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# *Thresholds 14*

Massachusetts Institute of Technology  
Department of Architecture and Planning



massachusetts institute of technology  
department of architecture and planning



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**spring 1997**

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## Thresholds 14

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## Natural Languages

*James O'Brien and Robert Clocker*

What does it mean to design from the outside in? What does it mean to build our landscape with an understanding beyond the naive conceptions of nature and the environment?

Cultures create metaphors through language and storytelling to define their relationships with nature. Within this context, institutions and practitioners today are creatively probing into the traditional divisions between architecture, urban design, and landscape 'architecture,' examining whether and how to blur these divisions to develop a curriculum for landscape within architecture and planning departments. A component of a funding effort by the Graham Foundation, of which the current Landscape Initiative at MIT is a part, this movement includes new programs at the University of Virginia as well as the University of Illinois at Chicago, where the term 'landscape urbanism' is emblematic of this new sensibility.

The relevance of finding meaningful correlations among the disciplines is heightened in the light of a new environmental consciousness that is reconsidering the very terms nature and culture as integrated concepts. If the two are intertwined, neither exists purely. Conceptions of 'manmade' as the artificial and of 'wilderness' as an unattainable original condition no longer seem useful.

Within this conception, one finds easy parodies of the separateness of the *artificial* and the *natural*, as well as intellectual constructs of the total cohesion of man and nature. *Thresholds 14*, however, investigates the space between these abstractions with a clarity of its own. Our authors—architects, artists, landscape architects, and writers—look to map this space through workable concepts and constructs: artwork, planning, building, and *not* building.

The photographs of Philip Jones throughout this issue presents metaphors for the terrain covered in its pages. In each image, Jones reframes industrial landscapes to create a haunting ambiguity as to whether it is nature or culture that is in advance or retreat.

The visual artist Paul Carter describes a collaborative project with artist Charles Anderson for the Teufelsberg, or Devil's Hill in Berlin. While metaphorically doubled as a "dis/appearance," the proposed excavation of this politically and historically charged site of erasure couples the mental terrain with the physical. Through analogies to the excavation of Homer's Troy in Turkey, and the rapid mental bridging of recent "terra nihilism" in the colonization of his homeland, Australia, Carter recalls the importance of the physical *palimpsest* built into sites throughout culture.

Ignasi de Sola-Morales casts a lexographic scrutiny over the advance and retreat of nature/ culture and its interplay with city planing. Within this essay, environmentally inspired ideas of 'mutation' and 'flow' less predictably mark important urban design considerations, illustrating that city building falls sway to greater morphologies than the mere building types and shape grammars of urbanism. Currently these changes are manifest in the strikingly *vague* spaces in our cities and suburbs, where the complicity of the natural and the cultural is brutally yet subtly divulged.

Both Christine McGrath and James Casper are concerned with the exterior surfaces of their structures as enriched by analogies drawn from their particular sites and environmental views. For McGrath, the scale and speed issues raised by the freeway interchange inspire a site ordering which also re-reads the ‘environment’ of consumerism. With Casper, building skin technology takes cues from the rules of natural processes, to physically integrate into his building ‘surface’ in the form of building materials. Natural weather patterns ‘seed’ change in his facades, just as the dynamics of traffic seed the signage surface of McGrath’s interchange.

Kristina Hill and Panayiota Pyla address the larger systems of which human action is only a part. Hill contests terms such as site planning, sustainability, and the notion of landscape design as a discrete act until they emerge with meaning; described and defined by methods, modes of analysis and built examples. Her attitude demands projects that carry formal beauty with results quantifiable within a meaningful ecology. Pyla’s work scrutinizes the very notion of environmental consciousness itself. Negotiating among historical conceptions of environmental consciousness, she argues for a synthesis between the analysis/paralysis of postmodern relativism and the over-ambitious globalizing assertions of modernist environmental thought.

Azin Valy and Suzan Wines might very well be illustrating this sort of negotiation. They present a design for a Brooklyn park with a dynamic infrastructure that incorporates both the natural and the social cycles of a locality. Seasonal variation in plant life reciprocate with periodic, celebratory ‘attachments’ to the structures.

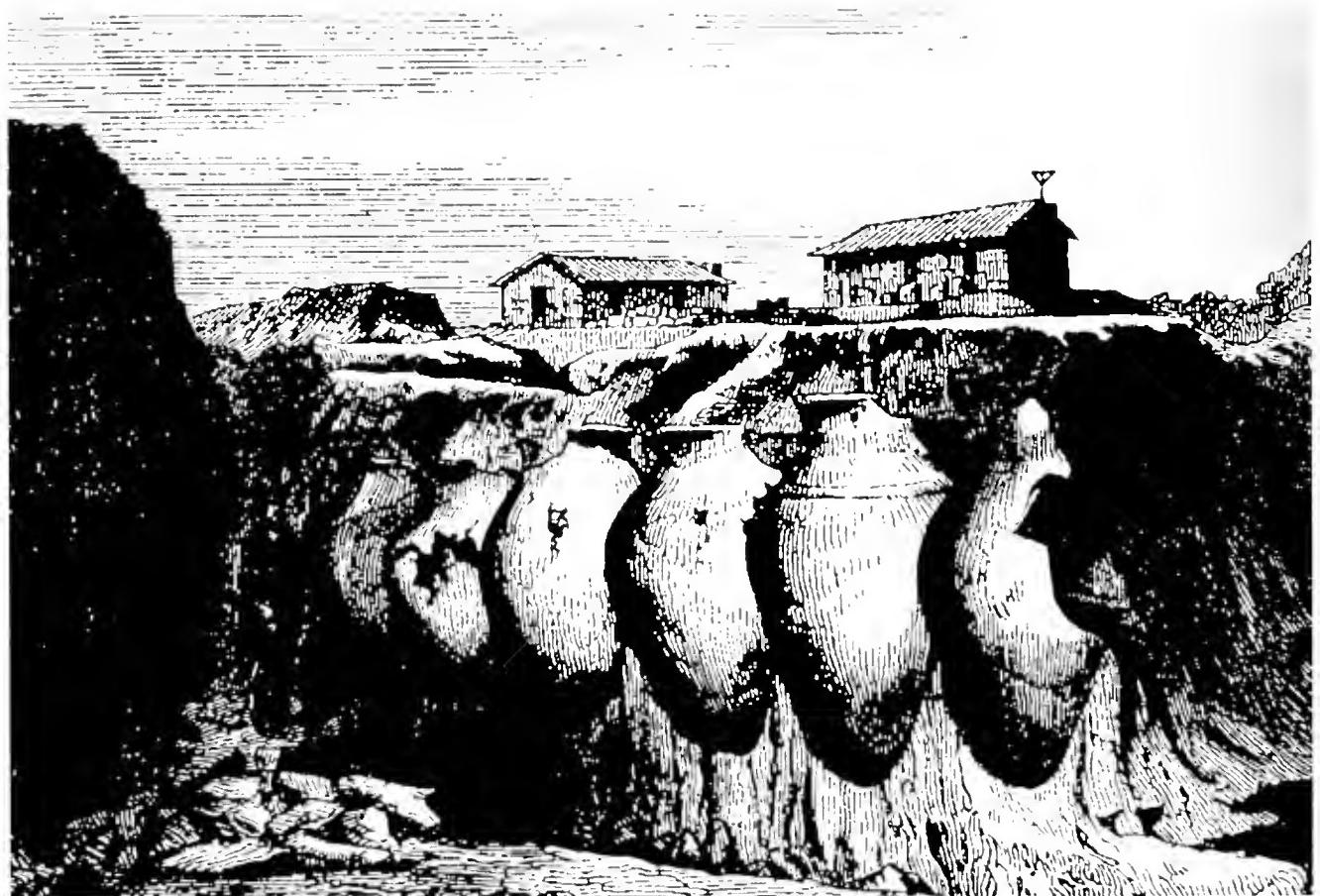
Next, we find in James Wines a tireless voice exposing the naïveté of typical architectural conceptions of the

landscape as separate and additive to the act of building design. He explores meaning through integration of the environment and building. His morphologies and methodologies posit ecological consciousness as an innovative building approach.

Mark Bain, a visual artist, sees the natural process of decay itself as a generative, potentially positive force. He pushes in another direction an idea shared with James Wines and Kristina Hill; that the over-abundance of building and development is an untenuated force today. Bain fashions a splendidly blunt proposal for the surreptitious ‘seeding’ of decay onto buildings. With entropy as an intellectual field of knowledge in bio-science, he follows some of the same guidelines as James Casper, but via a radically different methodology.

Aspasia Maheran, like Azin Valy and Suzan Wines, addresses the difficulties and environmental sacrifices of living in the contemporary city. Occupying two New York City rowhouse lots, her bathhouse project interiorizes ‘natural’ needs and bodily awareness. The ‘floor’ becomes a continuous surface of water, the ‘ceiling’ an outlet to the sky. Between, the visitor moves among ephemeral platforms, screens, and bridges, subservient to the greater influence of the sky/water elements. The body in the city is rejoined with these elements quantifiably deficient in both the urban experience and within our culture at large; thus bodies become the third integral component of nature in her interior landscape.

Maheras’ notion, then, of ‘corporeal consciousness’ leaves us where we began, in hopes of raising simultaneous awareness of how we can build the bodies (nature) and minds (culture) of our cities and landscapes at once. We have no other choice actually, for both will be built and unbuilt in each action and plan that we take.



## Against Projects

the Dis/appearance: waiting room collaboration

*Paul Carter with Charles Anderson*

A typology of projects would be interesting. It would reveal that even the projects self-consciously designed for the *salon des refusés* of official urban and landscape design mobilize a rhetoric of

throwing forward. Renegotiations between spatial disciplines occur, as it were, on already settled territory. Different positions—diverse design philosophies driven by antagonistic social and political visions—are adopted; but the conceptual language remains translatable back into the very discourse of projective geometry that characterizes the linear *koine* of public and corporate planning. In its presupposition of a *tabula rasa* environment (or in its engineering assumption that a flattened ground is the condition of design, even if the intended effect is picturesque), contemporary architecture and its disciplinary affiliates faithfully perpetuate a mental topography going back to the Romans. The other of this emptied-out space is an array of equally mythic landscape features such as the cut or the abyss. In a familiar self-serving double-bind of Western *logos*, the abyss is no sooner announced than it has to be bridged. The bridge, whose suturing of formerly remote banks is so lovingly evoked by Heidegger, is also the drawbridge of empire.

Dis/appearance: waiting room #1-7, emblem of the series derived from H. Schliemann, *Troy and Its Remains* (first published 1875, reprinted 1976 by Arno Press, New York), plate XIB, facing p.290. "Six of the jars are shown, and a seventh (broken) lies outside of the cut to the right." Besides embodying the dis/appearance paradox characteristic of any archaeology, the jars appear as dependent (or footless) objects, allied to the lie of the land; as wine-storage jars they also figure rates of exchange.

**figure 1**



Viewing platform, West Berlin,  
overlooking Berlin wall in no-  
man's land. Found object,  
research material for  
*dis/appearance, waiting room*  
#5. Pure expression of history  
as waiting room. The abyss/  
wall creates its own other.  
desire is a visual drawbridge.  
Ignoring the visual matrix, the  
historical trace of occupation,  
it overlooks the void

Photograph: Charles Anderson,  
1988.

Projections also project a temporal paranoia: the desire to engineer a leap over the intervening space is driven by deadlines, progress towards the

**figure 2** vanishing point of permanence (even if the market makes permanence relative).

Engineers and architects predicate their work on accelerating site amnesia—ignorance of land rights can also speed up the process. The idea that events might come to meet us is inconceivable; even Robert Smithson's elegant quarries, drawing attention to the temporality of time, could not slow things down. To suggest that habitat design entails attention to rates of spatio-temporal exchange—comparable, say, to the growth and decay cycles of natural systems or even to the assymetrical double-structure of human dialogue—is almost to report the apocryphal. (It is telling that in our project-based tradition the term *apocrypha*, meaning 'properly hidden,' rapidly came to signify 'groundless, false.') Waiting is imagined as the temporal dimension of emptiness; the corollary of this abyssal logic, buildings as stages waiting for time to begin, explains the frenetic concern to make public spaces functional, as if a pseudo-theatricality (or visual busyness) can prevent the appearance of the new space being seen for what it is, a disappearance in disguise.

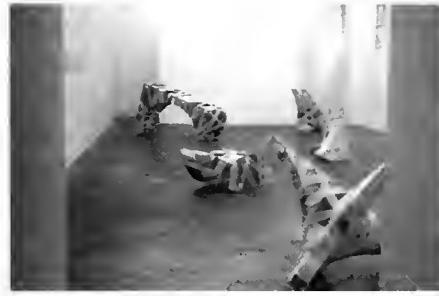
Against this admittedly summary background artist Charles Anderson and I are currently engaged in a seven-part collaboration generically known as *dis/appearance: waiting room*.

figure 3

Writing recently about the scope of our work, I identified its concern with “the direction and notation of a social space where different, less brutal forms of exchange (of passage, of met and missed desire) are conceivable—and practicable,” commenting, “it is exclusively at home neither in the gallery nor in the abandoned sites of the post-industrial city. Engaged in marking forms of eventfulness, an art of poses, orientations, arrangements, it is opportunistic, in a good sense parasitic on environments in a state of disappearance. These it may be said to colonize in a different way—in the process implicitly reflecting on the brutalism of urban renewal programs that stigmatize the in-between as ruin, void...”

This description can be criticized for a rhetoric, a projective style, all too familiar from the inflated self-descriptions architects and their writers give of their work. Still it intimates our desire not to inhabit a moral high-ground, not to occupy a post-colonial viewing-platform that pretends to transcend previous ideological blindspots. The question might be: how to ameliorate a history of colonialism? how to advance differently? A different poetics of urban and landscape design might involve an analogue practice, one grounded in rates of exchange, where two terms punningly alike but semantically diverse—chorography and choreography—converge. This at any rate is the theory: what of the practice?

The fifth of the *dis/appearance: waiting rooms* is devised for the Teufelsberg or Devil’s Hill on the south-west edge of Berlin. After the fall of Berlin (1945) whatever the heroic Trümmerfrauen could not salvage from the wreckage and use to rebuild the “dead heart” of the city was heaped up to form the Trümmerberge or “rubble hills”, the most dramatic of which is the Teufelsberg in the Grunewald, a rich site of historical *dis/appearance*. There is the obvious fact that over the years the Teufelsberg has come to appear like a natural hill, thus concealing its



*Dis/appearance: waiting room #1*, found wood, bandaging, iodine, mercurichrome. Anna Schwartz Gallery, Melbourne, 1995. An arrangement of bandaged architectural moulds, accompanied by a display of stain patterns formed by first and second generation “droppings” of off-cut masking tape. The catalogue essay evoked a connection with Schliemann’s excavations at Troy: “Gaping holes, footless bridges, half-arches: ruins before their time, queuing, the outsiders guess, for a waiting cure—an ending of the ending, separation’s suture, elastic infancy again.”

Photograph Charles Anderson.

historical eruption out of human ruin. More site specifically, there is the paradox that as the site where the traumatic material evidence of defeat was piled up and concealed, the Teufelsberg has become a commanding viewing platform, providing Berlin with what it lacked before, “an excellent view over the inner city.” The hundred-odd metre high Teufelsberg is *par excellence* a blindspot: *only by not seeing what it is—the act of historical amnesia it represents—can we project ourselves towards a glorious, if crane-punctuated, future*.

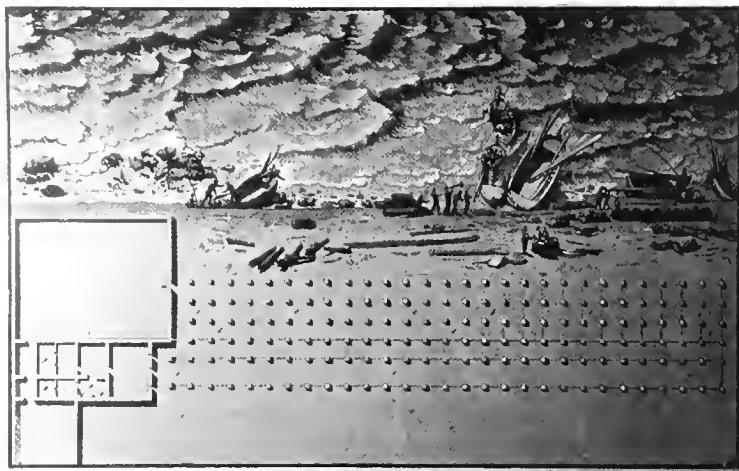
These paradoxes of site/sight are systemic in our culture of removal and reuse, and to point them out is not to understand their meaning. The author of *System and Structure*, Tony Wilden, notes elsewhere, “In therapy, sometimes the only way to begin to help people in a dangerous double bind they cannot ordinarily escape is to explain how the double bind works and then put them in a double bind they can get out of.” In this explanatory spirit we introduce a second “rubbish hill”, Hissarlik, the site of Homer’s Troy situated in north-west Turkey near the Dardanelles, and excavated by the German millionaire and treasure-seeker, Heinrich Schliemann. Schliemann’s obsessive belief that Prima’s Troy stood on bedrock meant that he destroyed the later, covering strata where, in fact, material support for Homer’s poems might have been found. And, as Schliemann, dug down, so “rubbish hills” began to grow, volcano-like in the adjacent plain. Nowadays the hill of Hissarlik resembles nothing so much as an open-cut mine or a construction site.

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Schliemann and Berlin's imperial fantasy are closely related; his so-called "Priam's Treasure" presented to the German people had the same symbolic function as the Pergamene Altar (also wrested from western Turkey): it seemed retrospectively to legitimate German's imperial design, reflected not least in Bismarck's expansive program of public works. But rather than explore the imperial ideology subtly expressed in this archaeological-architectural nexus, the practical point here is the superimposition of Hisarlik on Teufelsberg. Our idea, very simply, is to stage the excavation of Hisarlik on the plateau-summit of the Teufelsberg, an event that would not only restage a dis/appearance act but "explain" it. Our interest in superimposition might be thought childish. So it is: it is inspired by those Children's Encyclopaedia superimpositions of the Eiffel Tower on the Cheops Pyramid or the outline of Australia on the map of the United States. But these fantasies of comparison have venerable roots—in, say, Neapolitan philosopher Giambattista Vico's "poetic geography" whereby familiar names and arrangements of names are transposed to new countries, where they give the colonists an illusion of being at home. Poetic transpositions of this kind are indeed integral to the imperial project. Superimposed on an already named cultural landscape they stage another form of appearance as disappearance.

**figure 4****figure 5**

*Dis/appearance: waiting room*  
#5, 'Plan de la Barrière et du Bureau de la Santé' from J. Houel, *Viaggio in Sicilia e a Malta* (orig. in French, 1782; reprinted in Italian as, 'Storia di Napoli e della Sicilia' Società Editore, Palermo, 1977, table CCLIV. "Our proposal is to throw the Quarantine Station of Malta over the site occupied by the Australian Centre of Contemporary Art [Melbourne]." The multimedia installation is planned to coincide with the decommissioning of ACCA at the end of 1998. A class of "event-things" is intended for this "museum of dis/appearances": "double-objects, which exist only as relationships or conditions of dialogue; objects which lean, espousing an other which is not a compensatory prop but fulfills a desire; part-objects which, against the psychoanalytical orthodoxy, are not incomplete but possess multiple centers of gravity" (Design concept, 1996)



The therapeutic value of our superimposition would consist in revealing the ideological double-bind signified by our solidus, that “/” of our term “dis/appearance.” Staged on a hill without a history, archaeological digs and a second Schliemannopolis of associated structures at once identifies itself as a hoax. What can it mean to excavate a site where no rules of stratification pertain, where every part belongs to the same cataclysmic month or six weeks? And, digging down, nothing hidden can be brought to light, yet what lies everywhere on the surface of the site itself is now uncomfortably remembered. The ephemeral architecture and associated actions—chorography as choreography—not only enact the ideological paradox of a history grounded in a rhetoric of place predicated on the destruction of sites; it reveals the paradox as a “tangled contradiction,” that is, as an artifact of imperial, and projective, thinking. And it does this by an analogue process; not by seeking to impose on the site another permanent solution, but through an act of motivated mimicry.

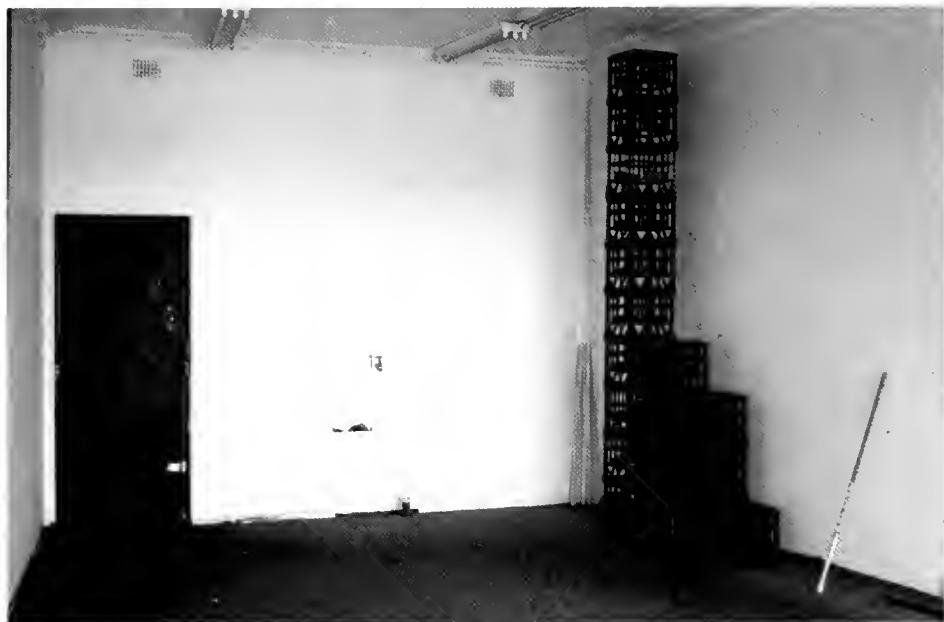
*Dis/appearance: waiting room #4*, photographic technology and light boxes, 1988-1997. Scheduled for Anna Schwartz Gallery, Melbourne, 1997. Nullbildung, the left-over images/non-images at the beginnings and ends of slide-film, have no name in English. Where the conscious photographic gaze closes its eye, the technological unconscious surfaces, characteristically as a chromatically-banded boundary and a remainder of tilted architecture. The significance of the ambiguous status of these images is hinted at in the earlier catalogue note for *dis/appearance: waiting room # 1*: "This will be another ambiguity of the dialectic, that it presupposes a shadow narrative of 'might-have-beens': without this theatrical context, the narrative of the powerful would have no meaning."



Readers patient enough to follow the argument thus far may well be wondering what the status of the proposed work is: will it, can it, be made *in situ*?

If not what is its status? Implicit in these questions is the assimilation of the conception to a project. Interestingly, a particular temporality attaches to this assimilation. Thus, the question is in a sense: what are you waiting for?—a question that already positions the work in relation to an architectural paradigm, as a future event to be fitted into a pre-existing space-time. One might recall Watt's meditation on the circular painting in Beckett's novel: "Was the picture a fixed and stable member of the edifice, like Mr Knott's bed, for example, or was it simply a manner of paradigm, here today and gone tomorrow, a term in a series, like the series of Mr Knott's dogs, or the series of Mr Knott's men, or like the centuries that fall, from the pod of eternity?" The circular painting alludes to Vico's conception of historical *ricorsi*, of periodic regressions to earlier stages of civilization, a phenomenon Germany has been pre-eminent in staging. But it might also be a metonymy of time in the waiting room, which goes nowhere though constantly dis/appearing.

**figure 6**



The interest of the work for us consists of the implementation of the paradigm. Our current intention is to mount an exhibition of the proposed earth-work in Berlin; to create

**figure 7**  
offsite a model; and to report on an event that may or may not have happened. Public reaction to the idea would be assessed; it is reasonable to suppose that

any attempt to create the work physically would encounter extreme opposition and antagonism. But conceptually, how would the work fare? It would enjoy another circulation in the social imaginary, all the more enduring as a memory site for not having existed.

*Dis/appearance: waiting room # 2, found space, photography, postcards. Wollongong Art Gallery and environs, 1995.* The negative critique of a "site-specific" aesthetic that drew a picturesque veil over another, no less fanciful, ideology that of real-estate driven economic recovery, was balanced by the evocation of an alternative concept of locality: "It is the duplicating of folds that occupies us, the increase of the crease. A territory represents a history of unfolding: but what mathematics will enable us to fold it up again? Blots may contain within them the genealogy of folds; and their future unfolding may reveal that what we took to be the final piece of the jigsaw is only an elementary fold." *Photograph: Charles Anderson*

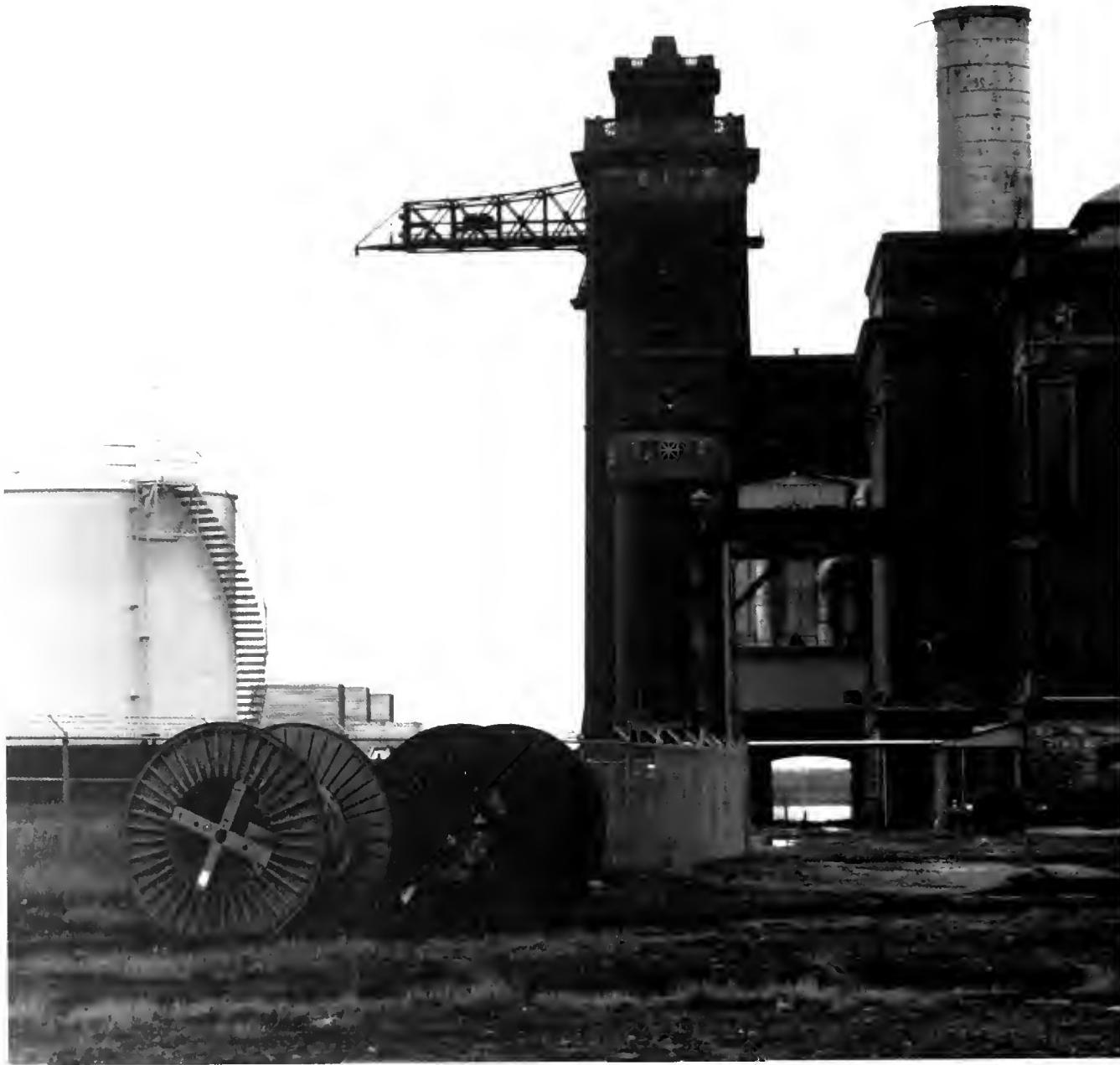
*Thresholds* readers may wonder about the provenance of our meditations, even wonder why two more-or-less resident Melbourne artists are focused on a trauma “so far away.” That could be part of it: the persistent myth of Australia as atopia, placelessly outside history, which serves neo-colonialist interests as efficiently now as it did two hundred years ago. One reaction to what might be called the institutionally endemic terra nihilism that made, and continues to make, Australia’s colonization possible (as it made Schliemann’s ransack of “Troy” possible) is an exaggerated localism. But the sentimentality of site-specificity which the latter position produces is no less projective. Our alternative position is to assert the historical and environmental fact of rates of exchange, and what might follow from that—different practices for creating interest, less appropriative and progressive forms of translation.

Viewing platform, Potsdamerplatz,  
Berlin, 1994, research material for  
*Dis/appearance. waiting room #5.*

Photograph: Charles Anderson.

**figure 8**







## **Marcus Hook**

*Marcus Hook, PA*

## Present and Futures

Architecture in Cities

*Ignasi de Solà-Morales*

18

That architecture is one and the same substance as the city is beyond question. That the city is one single piece of architecture, an idea put forward by Leon Battista Alberti, is a more problematic assertion. For Alberti the city was conceived as one great architecture where every individual instance of architecture within it could be conversely understood as a city in miniature. The hypothesis I put forward here is rather more modest.

Today more than ever the basic constituent parts of urban life tend to fall completely outside the professional work of the architect. The city is more than its buildings and architecture. Traditional architectural instruments of analysis scarcely engage or have the capacity to respond to these constituent parts of the life of the metropolis—transportation networks, highways, spaces reserved for the logistics of distribution, protected natural areas, virtual spaces for communication and entertainment.

The current urban condition, characterized by the diffuse but highly interconnected *megalopolis* which Jean Gottman spoke about as long ago as the 1960s as well as the *global cities* which Saskia Sassen speaks of now, requires an entirely new approach from architects. This is true of both classical and modernist attempts to rethink the relation between architecture and the city. The new and radical nature of the urban condition of the last thirty years has been pointed out by Peter Hall, who writes that explosive and vertiginous urban growth is no longer occurring exclusively in the developed world. In an equally powerful way it is happening in the underdeveloped and developing countries with startling speed.

My opinion is that the features and the processes that belong to this new urban world are too obvious for us to turn a blind eye and deny them a city charter of their own. These are techniques and processes that already exist,



that we currently operate with—blind, fragmented practices if you like—devoid of self-awareness or any critical process, but practices by which life in modern cities is organized.

Experts who are not trained as architects are the ones who control the development of techniques relevant to contemporary urban design. To these experts the following are poorly understood by the architect: motor ways, airports, integrated transport systems, interchanges, shopping centers, theme parks, massive leisure areas, tourist areas, self-built residential areas, mobile homes, and homes for the non-traditional family. The demands of ideology and mass consumption drive the renovation and preservation of “heritage” places, parks, and obsolete pre-indus-

trial spaces. The media then makes multiple and imaginary replicas of this milieu, creating and recreating virtual realities no less lived in than the physical realities of the big city. In many cases these systems and phenomena are foreign if not hostile to the entrenched ways of thinking and acting common to architects.

At this point I would like to suggest five platforms, after the manner of the thousand plateaus of which Deleuze and Guattari speak, from which to see, understand, problematize and evaluate the basic constituent parts of contemporary urban conditions. With an eye and an ear towards processes natural and artificial, I am attempting to classify the many-faceted infrastructure of the *megalopolis*.

#### **mutation**

The term *mutation* is intended to characterize the type of change that now occurs in cities. A random change in the genetic material of the cell produces alterations in one or more hereditary characteristics, bringing about a break in the inheriting mechanisms: a mutation has been produced which is a substantial alteration that will affect both the morphology and the physiology not only of the cell or the organ, but of the organism as a whole.

What we are increasingly experiencing in the city are processes of sudden mutation, not compliant with the notion of evolutionary transformation



and not conforming to a logical process leading from planning to building. Examples include the plan for the reconstruction of the center of Beirut, the expansion of the Pudong area of Shanghai, the reunification of Berlin, the renovation of the center of Bucharest, and the patterns of growth in Mexico City, Brasilia and Jeddah.

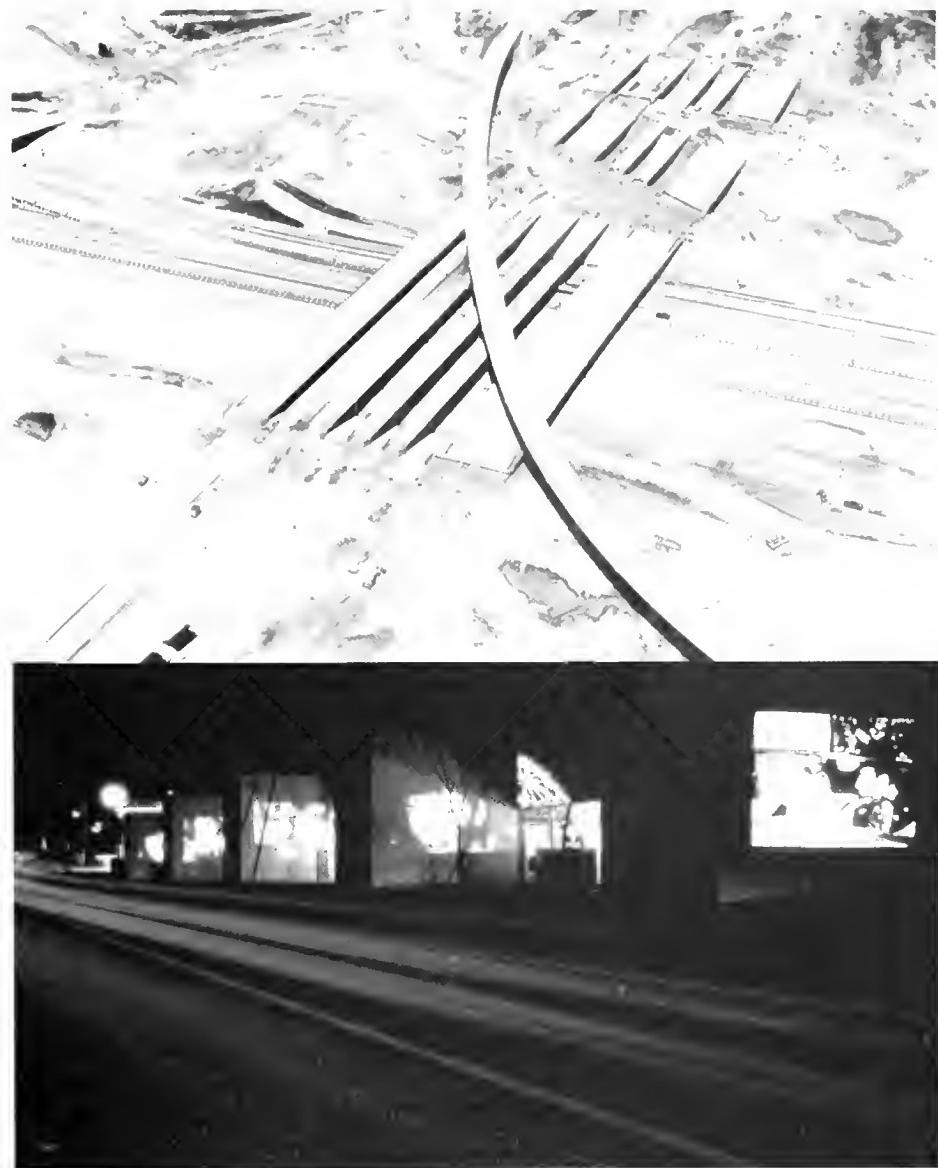
These are phenomena where neither organicist-evolutionist criteria nor the causal logic of the rationalist model can be applied. When such high capacity for accumulating massive development capital and for rapid destruction and rebuilding exists, thousands of acres of existing urban fabric and greenfield spaces will suffer mutations.

Compared to the logic of gradual evolution, these mutations seem sudden and unpredictable.

Designing for mutation, entering into its centrifugal energy, requires juggling a host of variables that cannot be controlled except with efficient management instruments. The platform of mutation indicates the necessity for open, interactive morphologies in which minimum criteria are the only laws organizing the rapid processes by which things move from one urban stage to another.

#### **flow**

The term *flow* is the second platform. This concept refers to a shift in understanding movement in the city that took place between the CIAM Athens Charter in 1933 and Team X in the 1950s. This critique is exemplified by Kahn's project for Philadelphia and the Smithsons' proposals for Berlin. Flow characterizes the shape and form of motion: networks, meshes, conduits, and staccato movements are recurring figures in projects about flow. Motion conceived in terms of flow signifies a break from the Einsteinian space-time used by the architectural *avant garde* of the early Modern Movement. At the *fin-de-siècle* architecture is moving towards the fundamental objective of facilitating traffic flow and interchange between different networks. This is so not only in the conventional field of transport—railway stations, ports and





airports—but also in places where there is an intersection of distribution modes. Architecture has to be able to plastically reconfigure its shape to be receptive to all types and forms of interchange.

#### **habitation**

A third platform concerns the form that dwellings or residences take. I propose calling this *habitation*. In recent years it has often been said that architecture has forsaken the problem of the dwelling. In the exhibition and catalogue entitled *International Property*, Yago Conde and Bea Goller concluded that the commodity of housing is designed and controlled predominantly by free market forces. The similarity between housing models from various distant parts of the world points to the legitimacy of this view. This is so despite the paradoxical fact that these markets have been cultivated with extreme attention to local and regional formal repertoires. The result is an injection of bits

of pseudo-identity into plans that nevertheless remain homogenous. The most innovative, valuable, and *avant-garde* production of new dwellings, on the other hand, are found in unique, one-off types of housing experimentation that are outside of, or at least tangent to, the great mass produced by the uniform housing market. Homes for immigrants, for a single individual, for transitory situations, for the homeless, the artist's home, and the architect's own home are today's favored testing ground for experimentation. But in underdeveloped and developing countries the problem of the dwelling remains a centrally important social and political problem. Intractable urban habitation problems in these contexts are usually tackled with a poverty of conceptual thinking. I see this as a sign of the difficulty of these innovative ideas to be creatively applied to the problem of urban housing.

#### **container**

A fourth area of attention concerns the form that exchange takes. For this I suggest the term *container*. In consumer societies productive activity depends intrinsically on the means of exchange. Contact with consumer goods requires a theater in which the market "performance" can be acted out. What are they like, these envelopes in which the ritual of consumption takes place, where the distribution of





desired gifts finds its worshippers ready to sacrifice portions of their accumulated wealth?

Containers are not always public, and not exactly private. A museum, a stadium, a shopping mall, an opera house, an entertainment theme park, an historical building protected so it can be visited, a tourist attraction—all these are containers. They are not transparent, they are closed-in. The “generalized separation” that Guy Debord spoke of in *Society of the Spectacle* is the basic premise that makes containers functionally adequate to their task.

Physical separation from reality is required to create an obvious performance or show area, to deny permeability and transparency, and to produce the maximum artificiality in climate, organization, and control. The space is always artificial, interiorized even in the open air. Produced by multiple, variable, ephemeral means, it is always enclosed by the rigid wrapper of the container. The architectural problem posed by the demand that containment include enclosure as well as programmatic diversity and superimposition of formal ideas is at once cultural and technical.

#### ***terrain vague***

The last of the proposed platforms refers to ambiguous places where the experience of historical time in the city can be felt and which enjoy a love/hate relationship with contemporary art, cinema and photography; these sites I refer to by the French term *terrain vague*. The term may be translated as *wasteland* in English but it is impossible to capture in a single English word or phrase the richness of the meanings of the French *terrain vague*.

In French, the term *terrain* has a more urban quality than in English where, if I am not mistaken, the word *terrain* has evolved towards uses in agriculture

has evolved towards uses in agriculture and geology. *Terrain* in French refers both to defined lots of land, ready for building, as well as to larger areas of territory in a potentially exploitable, expectant state. The term *vague* has two Latin roots, *vacuus* and *vagus*, which come together in the French usage. The first root *vacuus* gives us the sense of vacant, which is to say empty, unoccupied, and yet also free, available, not engaged. The second root *vagus* gives us the sense of vague in English, which means undetermined, imprecise, uncertain.

The paradox that is produced in the message we receive from these indefinite and uncertain *terrain vague* spaces is not necessarily a purely negative one. The condition of these spaces is internal to the city yet at the same time external to its everyday use. In these apparently forgotten places, the memory of the past seems to dominate the present. These are obsolete places in which only a few residual values

seem to survive despite their total disaffection from the activity of the city. They are areas where it can be said that the city is no longer. From the viewpoint of the real estate market they are marginal places, industrial areas, ports, unsafe residential neighborhoods, contaminated places. Our cities abound with this type of territory, abandoned by industry, by the railways, by the ports. These are areas abandoned as a result of violence, of the receding of residential or commercial populations, the deterioration of buildings. These areas are former dumps, gravel pits and quarries. They are under-utilized areas between two motor ways, along the edge of self-contained housing developments, and of restricted access for theoretical reasons of security and protection.

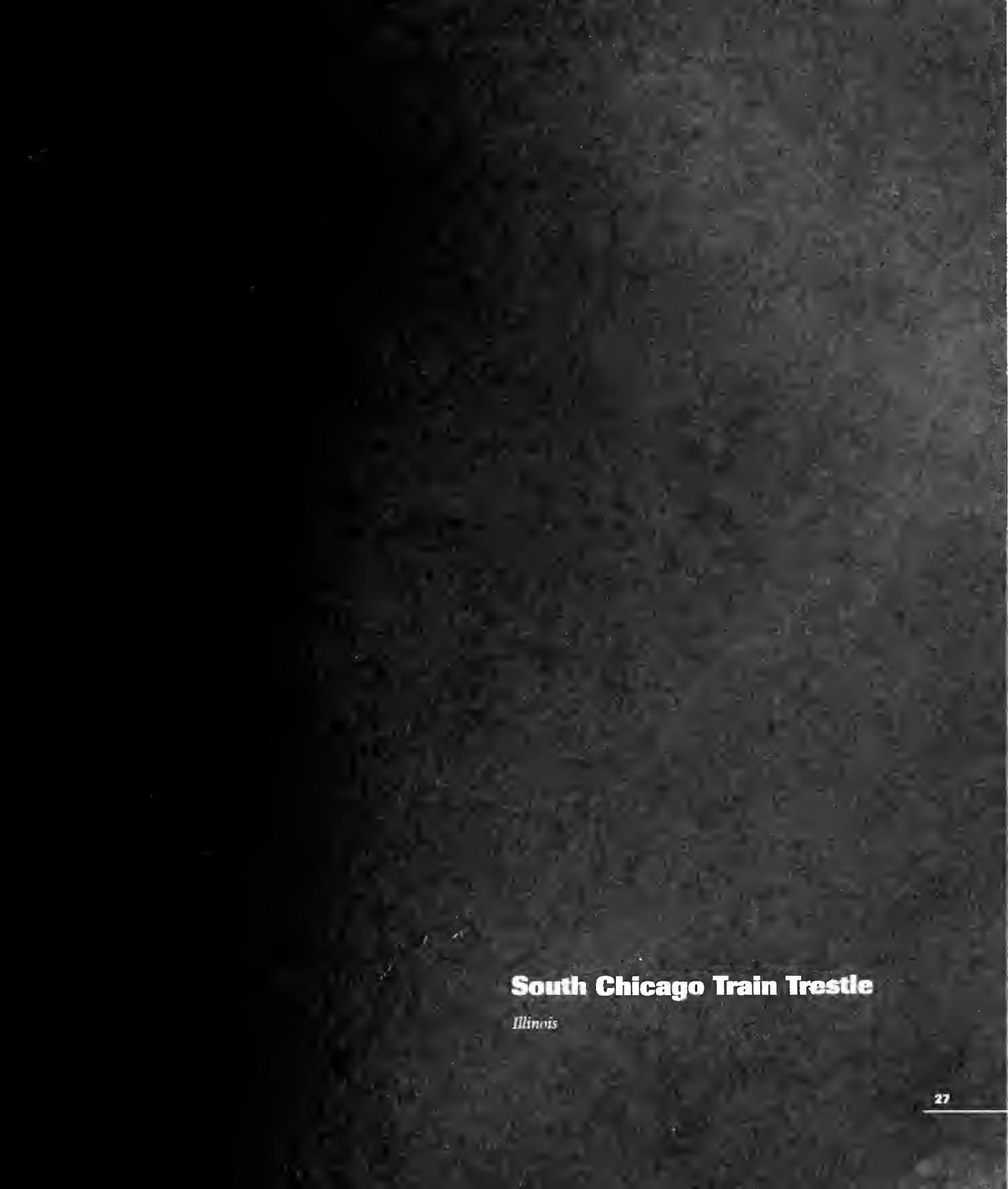
The conventional approach to the architectural and urban design of these places is to seek, by means of new projects and investment, to reintegrate these spaces or buildings into the productive urban fabric of the syncopated, busy, efficient city. But such operations of urban renewal draw strong negative reactions from sensitive people. Artists, photographers, local residents and others who appreciate the role of the ambiguous *terrain vague* feel profoundly put out by development there. They are disenchanted with the uptight, non-stop urge towards development of the city. The *terrain vague*

spaces are in fact the ideal places marking and maintaining the city's identity, the confluence of the past and the present, and the last uncontrolled spaces in which to freely act.

These five proposed cultural categories through which to understand a new relationships between architecture and the massive metropolitan areas of the present began with the notion of mutation and ended with that of *terrain vague*, which constitutes its counterpoint, the reverse of the metropolitan coin. This is not paradoxical. Only equal attention to values of innovation on the one hand and memory and absence on the other will enliven our confidence in a complex, plural urban way of life. The role of art (including architecture), Deleuze has written, "is not that of producing self-conscious objects for their own sake, but rather of becoming the revealing force that will make manifest multiplicity and contingency."







## **South Chicago Train Trestle**

*Illinois*

1 i grew up in a small suburb, about twenty miles outside of downtown chicago. i never thought i lived in a "non-place."



## Consolidated Periphery

Commercial and Highway Interchange  
*Master's thesis*

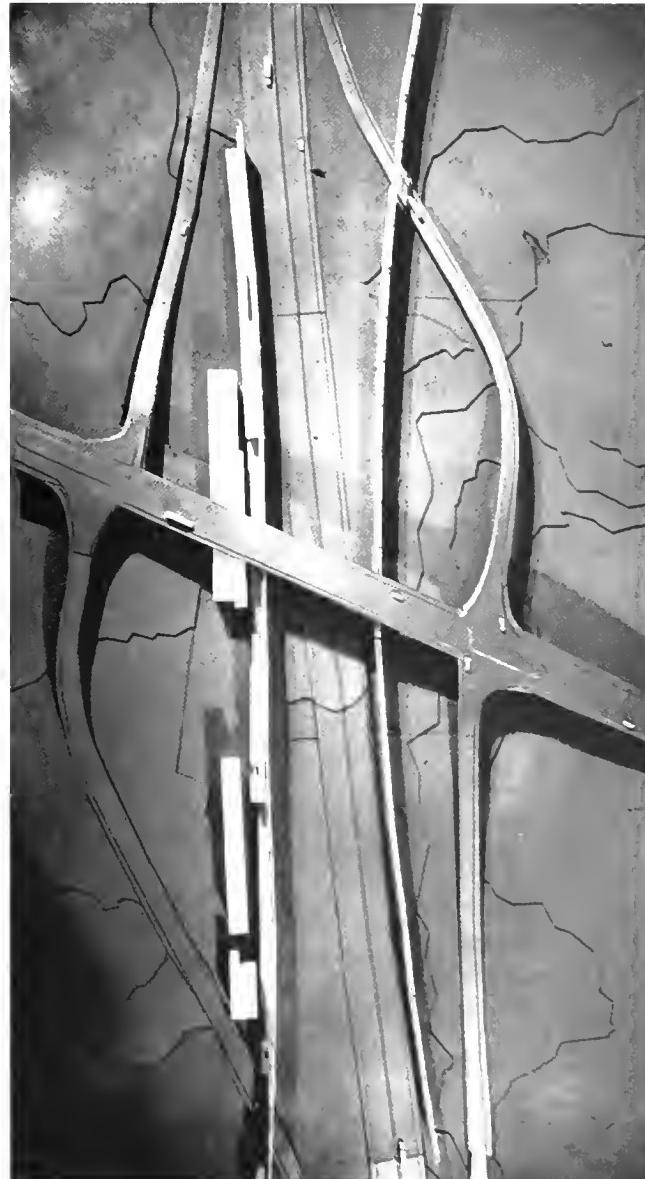
*Christine McGrath*

### Nostalgia Versus Nihilism in the Post-Industrial Suburban Context.

This thesis project advocates, to the (n)th degree, both and yet neither of the two positions. It is neither nostalgically yearning for an irretrievable past nor reveling in apocalyptic lyricism about the present. It offers neither "correction" nor "commentary." Rather it attempts to approach the suburban condition by accepting its reality, inclusive of all positive and negative aspects, and transgress that reality by questioning the "rules" which give rise to it.

The formal design proposal, as is the case in any design, may be debated. And while it is thought to raise a number of relevant issues concerning construction and articula-

tion in the context of the suburban strip, its evaluation and potential are more appropriately understood at the conceptual level. That is to say, the project is about more than the engagement of two walls at the highway's edge, it is about the implications of and suggestions made by their mere presence. Effectively, they suggest that the rationale of the suburban strip landscape can be both accepted and challenged, that its ideologies can be transgressed, and that there is potential for architecture in "non-place."



2 "suburbia" has been america's ambition since the late 19th century. capitalism, with respect to freedom, opportunity, and entrepreneurship, is an american ideal. i apologize for the presence of neither.



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4 within architecture, the "public sphere" may exist, architecture may, and ideally, facilitate this occurrence. architecture, however, is not a formula for "civics," a public space does not necessarily equate with the public realm; i.e., nor architecture, governs subsequent actions of the human race—people do.

### **development by 2006.**

The site, as a highway interchange, does not exist. By 1998, it will. By 2000, it will have transformed itself from what it was in 1998. And by 2006, its present 1998 condition will no longer be legible. To address the fact that the site is still to some degree a non-site, or hypothetical site, this study projects a potential evolution for the proceeding decade. Development, rather than emerging as independent privatized dispersed capsules might be amalgamated and compressed into a singular entity, tied to, rather than distanced from, the infrastructural network of the highway.

This is noteworthy at four levels. First, it addresses issues of dispersion and land consumption by grafting the suburban landscape and its constituent pieces into a single amalgamation and inserting them into the presumed "leftover" space of highway infrastructure. This obviates the current lack of integration between architectural and infrastructural endeavors in the suburban context. Second, its "insertion point", that being entirely within the proposed highway "right of way", calls into question basic understandings of ownership, and more pointedly, issues of

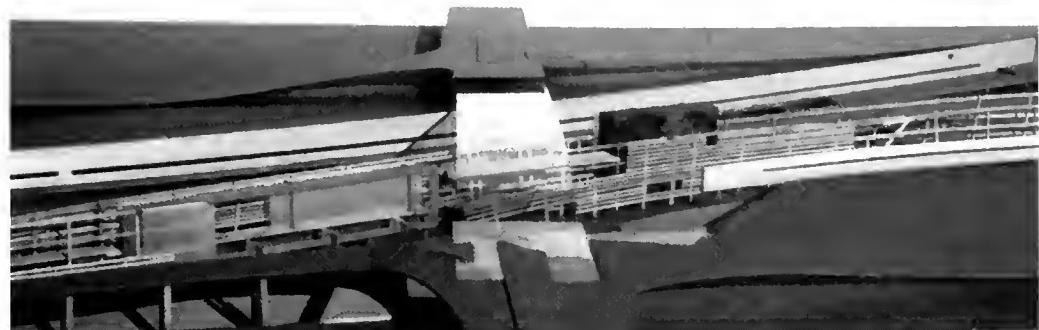
privatization. As the land encompassed by the highway constitutes publicly held land owned by the state, the location of commercial entities within this realm relegates ideologies of private enterprise to a unique platform. Third, at a larger urban scale, and at the scale of the highway, the scheme implicates architecture as a physical and psychological interface between highway and town, between line and place. Other "polar relationships" thus considered in the initial phases of the design include: movement/stasis, transience/permanence, public investment/capital gain, vehicle/individual, day/night,

front/back, top/bottom, and plan/section. I make the suggestion that adjunct elements of infrastructure might have a more supple relationship with architecture, such that the two might begin to mutually inform and limit the other's growth. In this case, a singular gesture made by two wall elements is intended to absorb most of the functions necessitated by both the highway and its associated commercial presence. The building can be read as an earth berm. It is the abatement wall. It is the strip mall, the parking lot, the roadway, and the billboard.



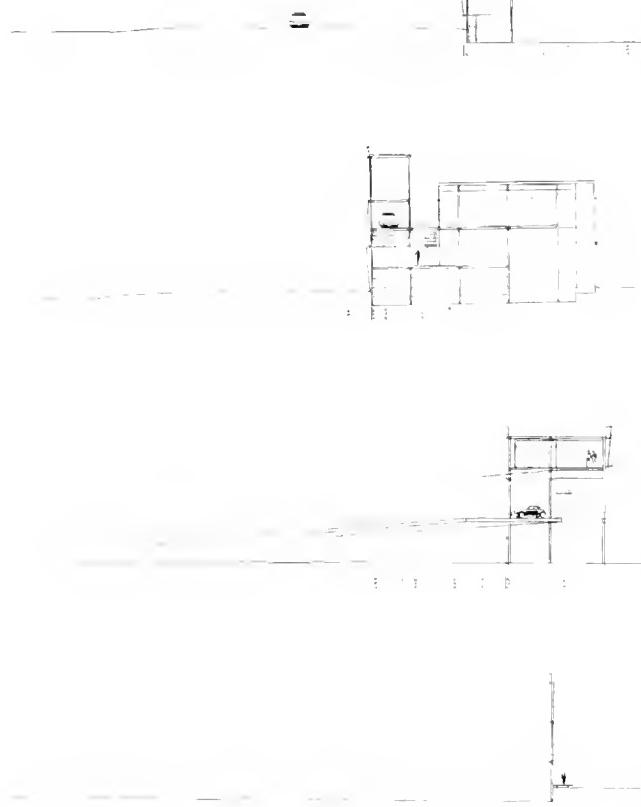
## access.

The building was designed to be roughly symmetrical about a diagonal axis in order that one would read its ends as inverted opposites of one another. The strategic benefit of doing this was that it allowed the building to carry equal weight at both the ground plane and at the roof. Eliminating hierarchy, or vertical stratification, was critical in order to make multi-story building an economically viable design solution. The access system allows one to either enter at the roof and traverse the building descending toward the ground plane or to enter at the ground plane and ascend upward. A third access addresses the highway traveller—the transient being, wanting not to stay, but only pause, momentarily. Acting much as a concourse in an airport, this sliver of space, running from the northbound exit ramp, piercing through the center of building, and re-emerging at the corresponding northbound entrance ramp, is the epitome of a fixated desire for efficiency. It is here, literally in this fast lane, where one encounters those spaces most rapidly consumed—the gas station, the dry cleaner, the automatic teller machine, the drive-thru, the coffee joint.



## program.

The distribution of program also follows an inversely reciprocal conception, a field of interspersed events activating the circulation spine which conjoins them. Roughly, the programmatic volumes are concentrated vertically about the building's middle and presumed most active level—that of the concourse, and horizontally about its center—most likely the location of the so-called anchor stores—compressing as much program as possible within this sector, in an effort to increase the likelihood of pedestrian activity in these zones. The spatial programming purposefully avoided a deterministic attitude, for capitalism will run its own course. The building sections demonstrate the purposeful implications of this fundamental texturing of program. In spite of any multitude of conditions that may occur along the building's length, these conditions are always relative to the condition of the wall. It is the common denominator, the unifier, the prevailing organizational element for the entire building.



6 my parents are typical suburbanites, they own a split level house on a cul-de-sac road, they live in one suburb and work in another, I don't know if they've ever been to the "town hall," they spend most of their time running from the bank, to the dry cleaner, to the grocery store.

Christine McGrath

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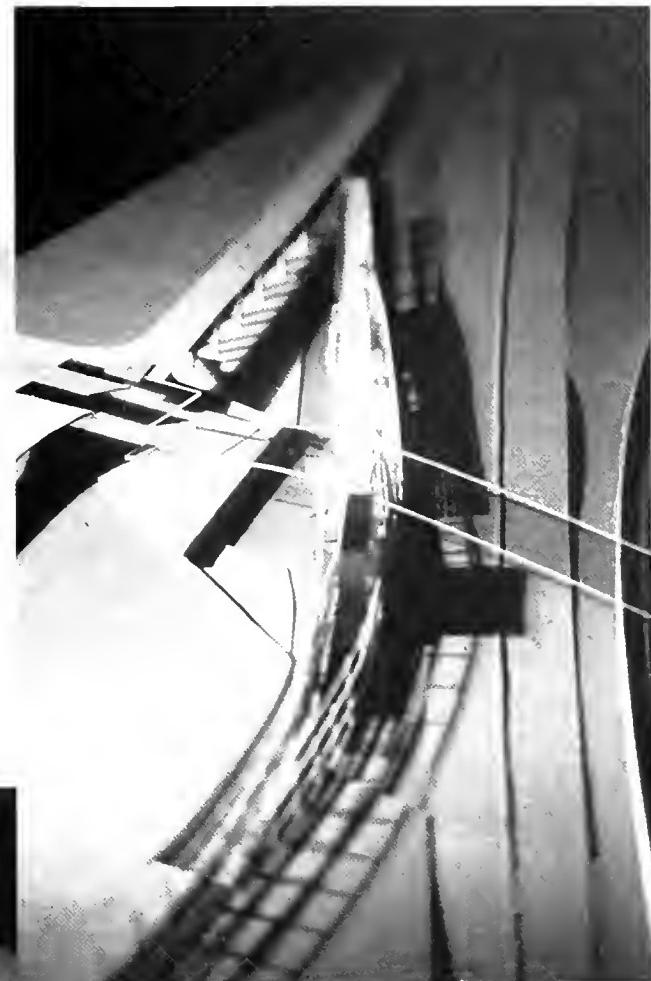
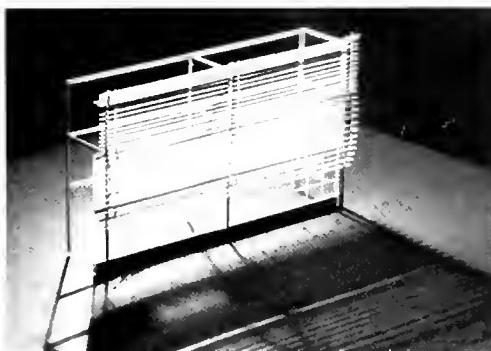
#### bacardi, vw, and the gap.

**Signage.** In light of most common applications, excluding more recent projects by contemporary European and Japanese architects, signage has held the deplorable status in architecture of "applique." While the Modernist aesthetic has little room for non-Corbusian extras and the postmodern revels in symbols, it remains that a project such as this must address the issue of signs. The necessity of signage in a retail/commercial building is not only accepted, it is appropriated, to the degree that is no longer viewed as additive to the architecture, but a part of it—neither duck nor decorated shed.

Effectively two strategies deal with signage—one operating at the level of the highway and the other at the level of the individual building components. From the highway, the building is two walls—program and the advertisements for that program. On the media wall, advertisements directed toward the highway traveller move at his/her speed. 28.8 seconds is both the length of the building and the duration of a typical commercial. Signage is used to forge an indelible inextricable relationship between two walls. One is three-dimensional space, one is the compressed two dimensional representation of that space. One is in motion, the other is static.



7 the seemingly chaotic formlessness of “exopolis” may not be chaotic or formless at all—it may simply have an order, a form, a potential we fail to see.



8 we might consider the decadence of consumerism, the naked ambition of capitalism, and the transience of the post-industrial nomad—epitomized in the “cyberpunk peripheral theme park of edge city”—as the plight of the contemporary american condition, or, conversely, we might reconsider them.

## Introduction

The layer of the Earth's atmosphere which contains clouds and weather systems is a thin thermoregulatory surface; it maintains an exact energy budget between the Earth and the Sun. Recent work in theoretical physics is aimed at these types of dynamic systems. Key to

a system such as the atmosphere is the constant yet fluctuating input of energy which forces the system into a state distant from its thermodynamic equilibrium.

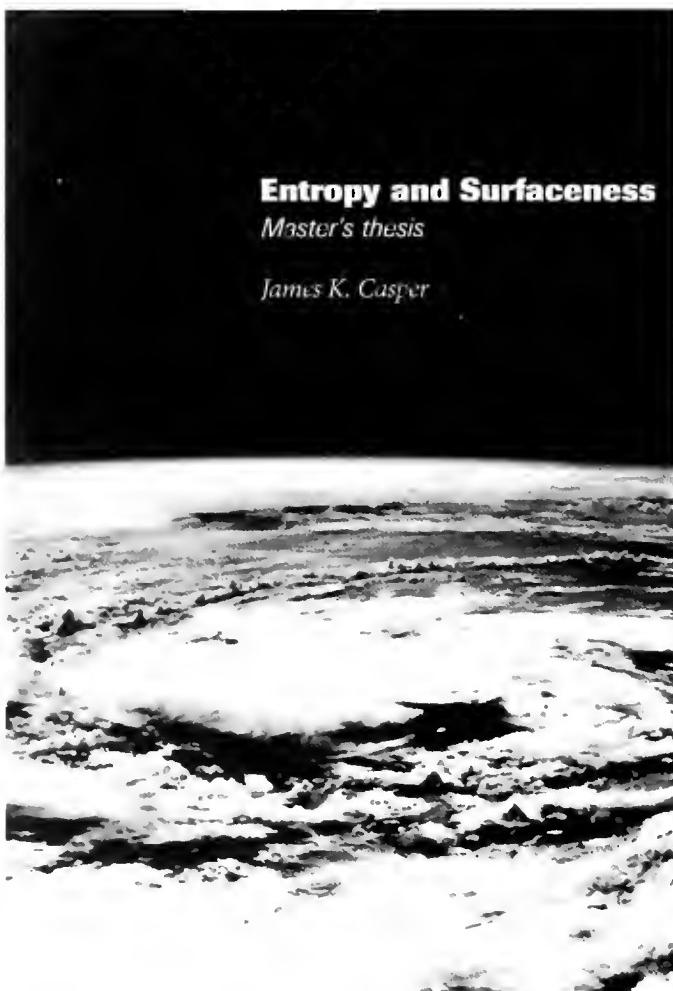
Certain physical systems, when past this point begin to organize themselves into dynamic structures which work to dissipate the incoming flux. As a result, they are decreasing system entropy, a characteristic previously only assigned to life or living matter. The line between living and inert systems has expanded to a field wide enough to work within.

Concurrently, developments in the engineering of so-called intelligent materials seek to invest material or inert matter with characteristics or behaviors of life. Scientists intend the materials to sense, process and respond to environmental forces in a dynamic bio-mimetic manner through engineering at the molecular scale.

This thesis project uses intelligent materials in the context of a built application. Customarily, physical or inert systems (such as a building) do not carry the trait assigned exclusively to life or the emergence of life—the reversal of entropy. This research investigates the possibility of employing such traits in building.

The proposed built system becomes a metallic alloy atmosphere on the thin surface boundary of a building. Working also to dissipate an influx of solar energy, the building's surface will develop 'weather systems', dynamic and cyclonic, moving across and around the metallic

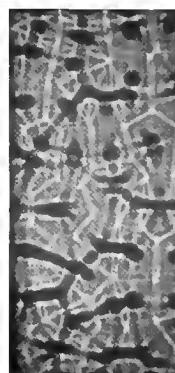
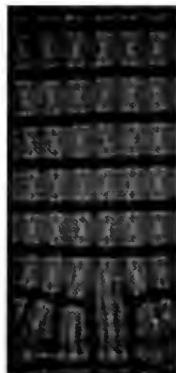
skin. Perturbations from the imprints of the clouds and shadows will seed the system, throwing it into flux as it seeks to feather out the disturbances and settle back into pulsing rhythms and patterns. Space, scale, time, orientation, and a metaphorical 'emergence of life' are re-introduced to building, a customarily inert or inanimate system.



"In the near future, border lines of the software field and the material region will overlap and finally merge together completely. This situation is found in various aspects of life including human being. The conceptual background of intelligent materials is a combination of advanced aspects of materials science and computer engineering which seeks to create composite materials systems which can sense and respond to environ-

mental changes in ways which maximize their function. Intelligent materials may be defined as the materials which respond to

environmental changes toward the optimum conditions and manifest their functions according to the changes."

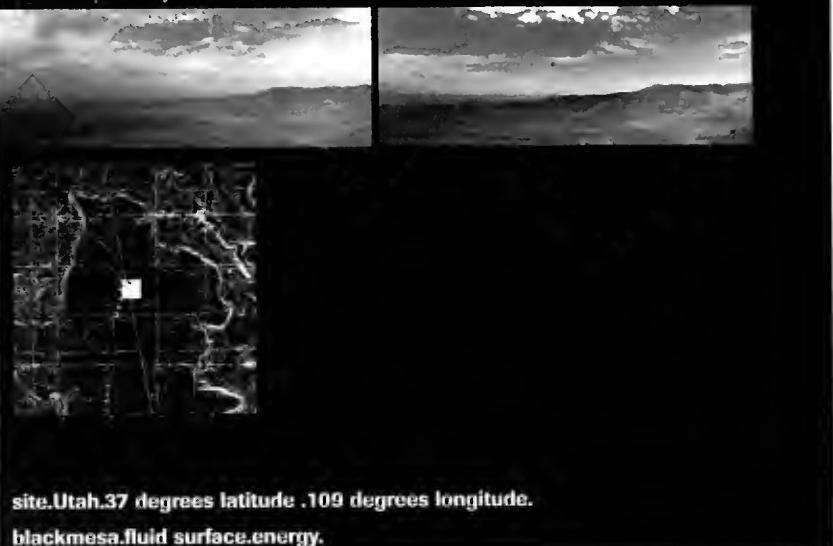
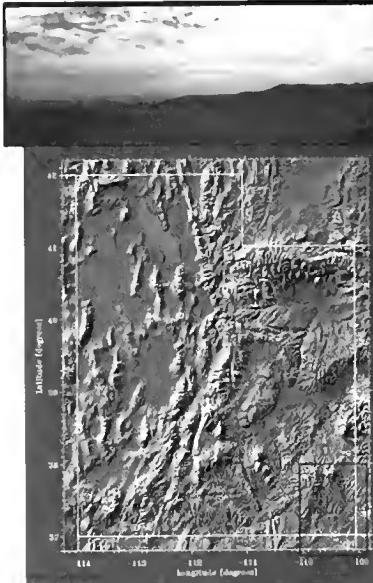


*-T.Takagi in his introduction to the  
"Proceedings of the First International  
Conference on Intelligent Materials"*

It is only recently that science has begun to approach certain specific 'functions' of the atmosphere. Studies directed at the consequences of ozone depletion have begun to chronicle the role of weather formation in relation to the earth's so-called 'energy budget'.

The earth's atmosphere acts as a thermoregulatory 'surface' between incoming solar radiation and the crust. A combination of thermal convection and rotation, weather systems develop energy fluxing from the equator to the poles and back into space. These rhythms leave unmistakable physical and psychological imprints on the life contained within as useful registration marks on the earth for orientation, scale, space and time. All aspects of life are affected by, maintained by, and generated in the process.

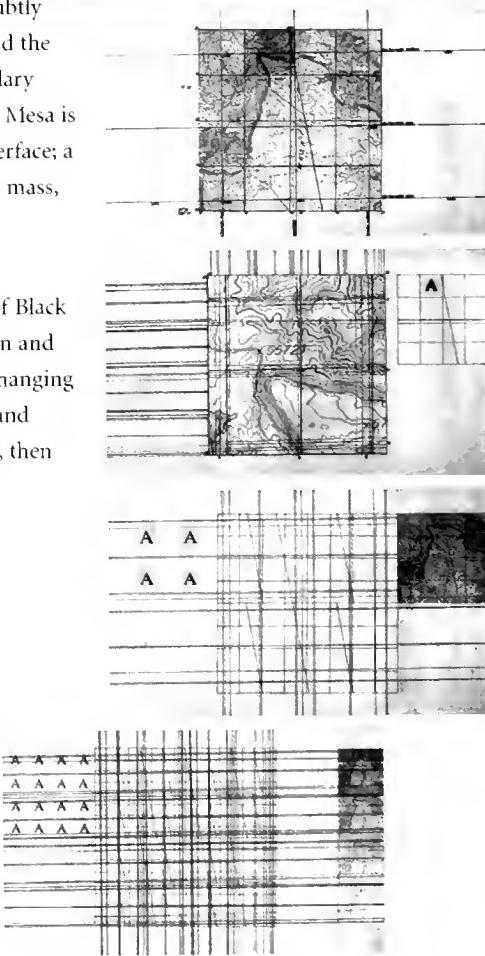




A hard, ore-like crust, brittle, obdurate and subtly shifting. Fastened between the atmosphere and the mantle, Black Mesa is a literal material boundary between fluid systems and their energy. Black Mesa is a thin surface of shifting entropy; a phase interface; a non-material singular surface bearing surface mass, momentum, energy and entropy.

#### **survey maps.scale.length.iteration.**

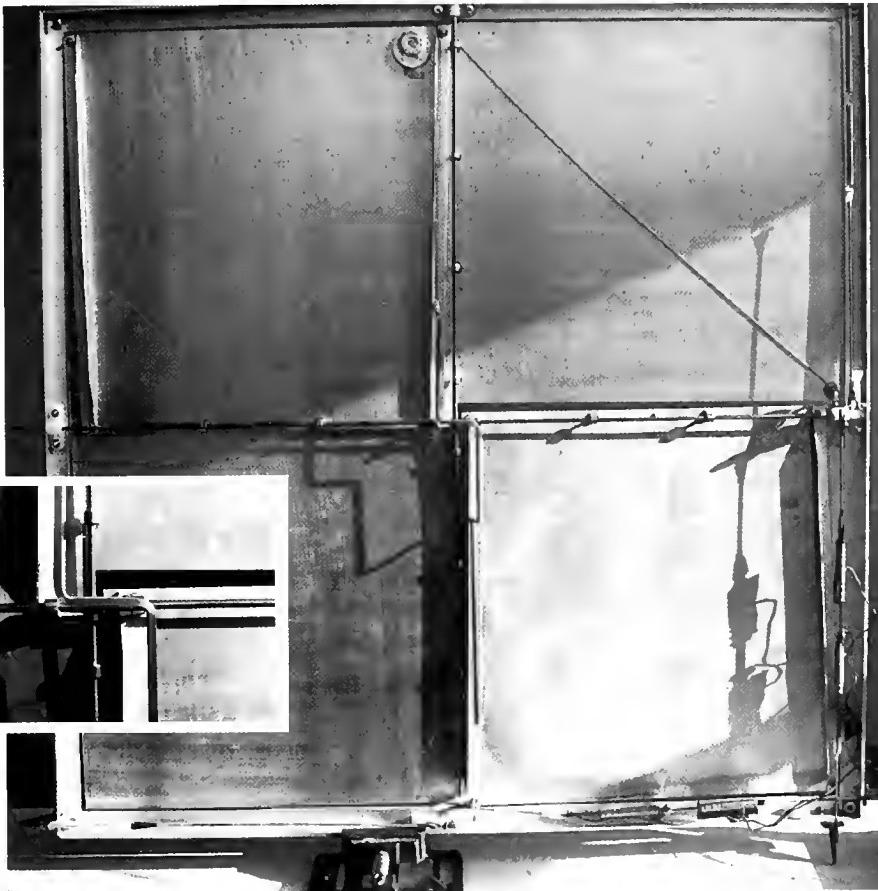
In plan, the survey lines on the USGS maps of Black Mesa betray formal circumstances of elevation and space. The lines tend to reverberate around changing landscape intensifying with greater quantity and shorter length. This exercise reads those lines, then reiterates them in multiple scaling processes.

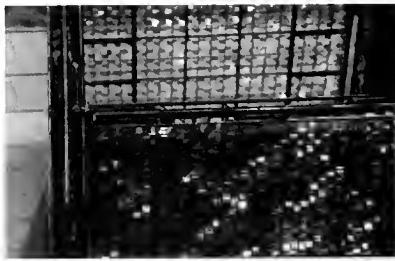


### Nitinol, a shape memory alloy (SMA)

Within a system maintained far from equilibrium, shape memory alloys, SMAs, as 'dissipative media,' can be predictably 'activated' at any one of many specified moments of change in the environment.

Nitinol is a material which can be precisely adjusted to desired specifications or transition temperature of force. Importantly, Nitinol has molecular dynamics very similar to that of water. Below its transition temperature, it can be stretched or elongated. Above the transition temperature, it undergoes a radical change to a different molecular structure. The transition temperature can be adjusted to activate at any specified change in the environmental temperature.





A building panel system could be open or closed when coupled to an SMA actuator. When assembled in an array, the entire system could begin to adjust its 'albedo forcing' by working as a system simulating thermodynamic of fluid system almost exactly the way an actual atmospheric system would. The 'rule' for the system could be adjusted to the particular site climate. In the initial development, however, it may be better to link the panels to a photovoltaic cell which would then power the SMA. Nitinol has the power to produce a great amount of force with a small charge. An electrical connection between neighboring panels allows each to read the energy level of their nearest neighbors and adjust according to the rule.

Initially it might seem that there would be no reason for the panels to begin to operate individually, that they might each act in the same way, because it is the same sun striking the surface of the system. However, more local 'seeding' could occur with a passing cloud or a shadow. This seeding effect would activate the system into a complex behavior, growing and dissipating the perturbation until the system again returns to its operating parameter. The system should now retain its operating parameter by being in constant dynamic motion. It will have evolved into a 'sea' or atmosphere, growing patterns and structures which dynamically evolve, move, emerge and decay.



#### **A daily cycle of reactions.**

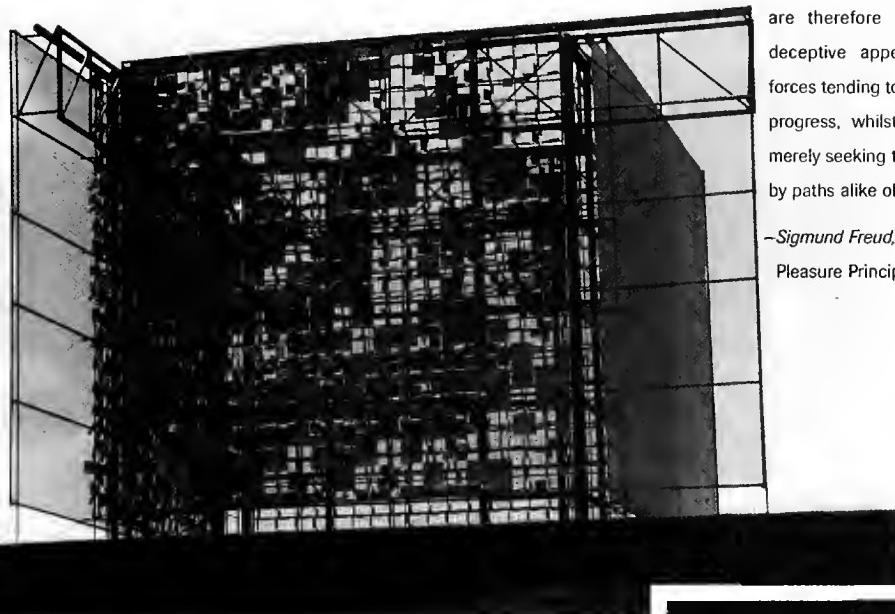
At night the array will go to sleep, and the system will become transparent. In the morning it arises, identifying the sun, its muscles cold and inflexible, but straining to move. As the system warms, it loosens up, the sun moves behind a tree and it yawns slowly into motion. The shadow of the trees is feathered repeated into a field of rippling grids. Slowly at first, then increasing in scale. As the sun passes the corner, the south facade swings into motion while the east surface relaxes back into a subtle shimmering field. More motile now, the systems feverishly work to dissipate the sun. Systems develop, spiral, vortex, hurling across the array's face and disappearing into infinity or off the side of the face. Inside the light constant, yet active. The sun moves to high noon and is strong. The system shelters, slow again and almost opaque and solid. All interior light is now reflected from the north, east and west. The western sun is hot and the west wall closes quickly to a steel wall, obdurate and unyielding. The muscles are tight and hold fast against the radiation. Finally, as the sun falls quickly processes reverse and the sunset is within the atmosphere of the systems. Color, light, heat, and steel fall back to sleep. Tomorrow there might be a thunderstorm.

The building envelope is a microcosm of our atmosphere and building scale of its entailed dynamics. Fenestration becomes temporal and omni-spatial. Orientation is etched on the surface like sun on skin, unconsciously knowable. Boundary and enclosure are elusive, non-reducible, non-reproducible and never the same twice. The metallic skin is a snowflake, a storm, an ocean, an organism.

"Let us suppose, then, that all organic instincts are conservative, are acquired historically and tend towards the restoration of an earlier state of things. It follows that the phenomena of organic development must be attributed to external disturbing and diverting influences. The elementary living entity would from its very beginning have had no wish to change; if conditions

remained the same; it would do no more than constantly repeat the same course of life. In the last resort, what has left its mark on the development of organisms must be the history of the earth we live in and its relation to the sun. Every modification which is thus imposed upon the course of the organism's life is accepted by the conservative organic instincts and stored up for further repetition. Those instincts are therefore bound to give a deceptive appearance of being forces tending towards change and progress, whilst in fact they are merely seeking to reach an ancient by paths alike old and new."

*-Sigmund Freud, Beyond the Pleasure Principle*





## **Learning Where Not to Build**

*a conversation with Kristina Hill*

*Kristina Hill is a Planning Professor at MIT. Through a combination of written responses to questions and a face to face discussion of the issues she addresses as an educator and Landscape Architect, the Thresholds editors compiled the following transcript, taking loosely the form of an interview.*

**Thresholds editors** You have mentioned previously some of the attitudes and skills you hope architects and planners can take away from an education in Landscape and Ecology. In the courses you teach at MIT—Site & Urban Systems Planning and Landscape Ecology & Urban Development—you have described the primary skills students can learn as those related to identifying innovative spatial strategies, which you see as the root of design. While teaching site planning is important in schools of architecture, you see a more crucial need to instruct “site reading.” What is “site reading”?

**Kristina Hill** I do think “site reading” is the place to begin, not site planning. But if you don’t take the time to learn a language, you can’t really comprehend texts — even if you can read the words. Most of what can be taught in one or two courses is just a beginning — a skeleton for really “reading” sites. The act of interpreting what one “reads” is fundamentally the act of designing — so I don’t think “site reading” can be taught effectively outside a studio context, where students could apply their new ability to “read.” I think the critical things architects and planners need to understand about sites are the things which can be diagrammed spatially and temporally. Once the characteristics of a site or landscape are diagrammed, this new representation reflects a set of priorities. Without priorities, the “text” presented by any site—however small—is boundless; there’s nowhere to start, nowhere to stop, and no order in what can be interpreted. That’s why I come back again to this question of strategies and priorities. Without them, we can’t associate cultural meaning or relative value with the spatial structures we devise for the site.

A lot of students I talk to from architecture have heard about systems ecology and they’ve seen diagrams where systems cycle. They’re familiar with a kind of leftover from 1970s systems approach, a kind of ecology described by these spaghetti diagrams of flows, and boxes, and systems. But this has no spatial dimension to it. If on the other hand, you look at landscape ecology, which is the sub-discipline of ecology which looks at the interaction between spatial pattern and natural process, then you can begin to say sure, everything is connected in some way, but, things are not all connected in the same way. In landscape ecology, one wetland is not the same as another; all wetlands are not “equal”; there are different points in this system that emerge as unique points—that can be diagrammed—where things can be done. For example; to restore an urban stream, all locations along that stream are not “equally” suitable. Or, if we want to improve urban water quality while we develop a higher density architecture, we’ll have to look strategically as to where are the points we can build filtration devices into the higher density urban system.

So there are those places in the landscape that are not the same as other places, that have to be identified through some sort of assimilation of all the detail out there. We can identify the strategic information in all the detailed information, that’s site reading. The value of teaching how to see and record the strategic information is in learning how

to graphically describe what's important in our "readings" of sites and landscapes.

**ed** It is fairly common for architects to begin with the given site and context in devising spatial layouts for their built forms. In fact, there is often a deep reliance or even a dependence on this context. How do you see that site reading and landscape strategies could be different from this? To put the question in a negative framework, how are the typical ways in which architects examine context limited or misleading?

**KH** A lot of architects see the site they are presented with as either a blank slate, the equivalent of a white sheet of paper they can do anything with, or they see elements of a romanticized natural virtue—maybe a stream, a grove of old trees, or a visually striking rock outcrop. In the latter case, the designer's impulse is often to put the building next to this romanticized element of the site, as if to draw some kind of power from it.

If you look at Peter Walker's work in corporate headquarters buildings you see this. He'll juxtapose a corporate building with a meadow, using the icon of the prairie in opposition to the corporate. But saying its a prairie only three acres in size is like saying you've got a three acre ocean. You can't have a three acre prairie. You can plant prairie plants in three acres, but the concept of a prairie is a much larger system; its regional.

Understanding the site as part of a larger dynamic system is absolutely critical to seeing what kinds of innovative spatial strategies might make sense. This incorporates



the reality of on-going processes which tie every site into a larger pattern of water flows, wildlife movement, and natural disturbances like fire or windstorms. And yet very few architects or planners visualize these dynamics in ways that let them realistically dimension their plans for the site. They may hold onto the concept and terminology of dynamic change, but very few learn to perceive and structure a specific, relevant material reality in response to it. That essentially static understanding of the elements of a site is without a doubt the most misleading approach any designer can adopt.

Some of what Bernard Tschumi is doing in Parc de LaVilette is critiqued by landscape architects this way. Although he thought of the park as different systems—the gardens, the paths, the follies—and overlaid them, the juxtapositions themselves are supposed to be these wonderful accidents. This is problematic on a number of fronts. First, juxtaposition is not an accident in the real world. The accidental juxtapositions in Tschumi's design end up being banal to most people because they don't have any meaning, any cultural leverage. Like English words without any grammar, there's no art to it. Secondly, the idea that the chaos and disorder of nature are juxtaposed with the systemic sampling of the follies in fact isn't something that you experience. There's no sense of the surface once Tschumi's "layers" are combined. Its fine if you enjoy his drawings of it, but when you actually build those places you experience all those things at once. Its like the way that the layers of Photoshop are, together, what makes the image. All the layers in all those exploded plans are what makes the image. But that's not what you're building or what you see. You're not building the three dimensional chess set axonometric. People somehow lose the sense of that in the stress and glory of a design competition.

Thirdly, the naive conception of nature as the "disorganized" is carried in those accidents. The accidents are supposed to be the chaotic, and this is where nature "occurs." Here the follies are a grid, like random samplings in the way scientists sometimes sample the natural world, and the natural is the "disorganized." On the intellectual level the idea is that the accidents in our perception allow

us to see things that we otherwise would not see; the sort of “chaos” of the natural world. That may work as an intellectual idea but I don’t think it makes sense. Nature is still conceived of as the other, but nature is not the other. Nature is us, our bodies, our creations.

Yet with this concept, it does seem like in our cities, our population, we compensate for nature’s perceived lack in other ways. This is so strange, but there are people in our urban areas that we think of now as wolves. There are incidents of violence called wilding. Attacks of a “pack” of evil young men made on women or other young men. These actions are so aggressive and so violent and so incomprehensible to us that we think of it as wild, as wild behavior. If you think about cities as places with natural environments that contain other species, here humans have replaced other species in occupying all niches. Now we tell stories about black people, about violent urban places, and make movies about it. We represent to ourselves, to other people, the whole range of species—from wild terror to cultivated caring—that we once represented with stories about wolves.

**ed** How do you think this sort of approach and this sort of an attitude towards nature might be overcome? In design studios especially, do you see a model for integrating the disciplines?

**KH** I think there is no substitute for the kind of energy and passion multi-disciplinary studios that involve environmental scientists as well as artists, engineers, and other design professionals can pass on to students. But I also think an “event-based curriculum” in which students have shorter, more intense collaborations can create extremely memorable experiences, and teach very important lessons that stick in people’s minds. I think a good education should use both methods of exposing students to multi-disciplinary work—sometimes in semester-long studios, but at least once each term running intensified charrettes that involve a field trip or some memorable physical experience as well as a design exercise.

What’s missing from the education students get in both departments of this school is an ability to compare and prioritize urban design strategies, in a very basic sense,

and of course the larger body of knowledge of how natural processes both affect and are affected by our spatial planning decisions. What’s missing from my own courses is probably an articulation of the connection between, on the one hand, the functions embodied in the physical and biological environment—and on the other, the world of cultural myths and stories which allow us to interpret that environment and choose how to act in it. I don’t have the time to cover all that ground in the seminar courses I’m teaching now, and only hint at these connections (in a way that I hope makes students curious about them!). For example, both of my courses have become focused on water as an element of urban design and spatial planning, but use different emphases and project contexts to communicate what it is that could be called “strategic” about the role and meaning of water in urbanized areas.

Really, the most important piece of an urban design education that I think is missing in our departments is the critical ability to know when to STOP making more and more extensive cities—and what to do as an alternative. If planners and designers don’t know when and where not to build, the concept of sustainability won’t be a meaningful part of urban design.

**ed** Can you say something more on this ability to “know when to stop” and the concept of sustainability?

**KH** I think that the future of this whole sustainability question, the future of landscape and urban design, is not going to be so much what we do around buildings in new development areas, although that’s always part of what we do for quality of public spaces, but rather, a two-pronged approach in the future, where on one had we’re thinking about making cities more dense and compact and that really work (and in the U.S. that’s no small task); and on the other hand looking at what we’re going to conserve. My work right now ranges from asking what the water quality impacts are of denser developments to National Park areas, where we’re really trying to preserve wilderness as a concept. I work right now in Canada’s Jasper National Park, which is designated one of their wilderness parks.

The problem is that development isn't just happening in certain places; urbanization is happening everywhere. there's a town of 5000 people in the middle of this wilderness park, and development has been crushing the parks, whether it's there, or whether its Yellowstone, or wherever. Our urbanization and the internationalization of urban financial capital is putting pressure to develop on all of these areas. If we don't take a two-pronged approach in knowing what not to build on, we're not going to have anything else but cities 200 years from now.

**ed** This is not unlike the ideas of the modernist environmental planner Dioxides, mentioned in the work of Pani Pyla elsewhere in this journal. Dioxides had something to say about zoning the world in terms of development/non-development priorities irregardless of national, ethnic or regional boundaries in order to preference environmental balance first

**KH** If you want to have a spectrum from wilderness areas (where we feel there is something larger than us), to dense urban areas (where we enjoy our own social interaction and feel part of our own society), we're going to have to do this consciously, its not going to just happen. Development pressure is just a continuous surface across the planet right now. There's no place that's really not under development pressure (except, ironically, some of our older cites.) And I think that there's been a romanticization of what wilderness is or what nature is in architecture which says: "I can put a building or set of buildings next to something and create a contrast using landscape" or says "landscape is the Borg or the non-human, and the building is the human or the cultural, and therefore the building puts the non-human in context".

But in fact that's not true, because all of our landscapes are heavily reworked, manipulated, cultural arti-

facts. Even wilderness is something that's in debate as to whether the possibility for wilderness exists at this point. In the way that the atmosphere and historical activities of many people have affected landscapes. Everything is a cultural landscape. The idea of wilderness has to be reinvented and may even apply to cities as well as to almost rural areas. There are parts of New York City that are "wilder" than parts of Canada.

So I guess that's why I bring up the question of where to stop developing. The New Urbanists have talked a lot about compact development and benefits of urban sustainability, but most of their projects, almost all of their projects are on greenfield sites—they're on new sites, and that's not sustainable So how do we get that idea to apply to cities and keep the alternative? Having an alternative is important in understanding what the gradient is, from the least developed to the most developed. It's simply not the future trajectory that we should develop everything in some way.

**ed** You seem to be suggesting that a better model for project development would begin with site reading, site analysis, the inclusion of landscape architects, and then lead into the architectural proposition. Do you have other examples of practices or specific projects that have benefited from such cross-disciplinary efforts?

**KH** I think there are endless examples of ways in which strategies literally grounded in the site have resulted in better designs overall. Two that come to mind right away are the original campus plan for the University of Virginia and the plan for the Salk Institute in California. Both of these were sited with an eye for "the infinite"— they opened out onto views of a distant horizon, in order to connect the viewer with both her immediate surroundings and, simultaneously, the larger world.

These designs are not just about the immediate surroundings. There is a second and equally important siting concept about making a conceptual connection with the distant horizon, the greater whole. This is what's revealed in Vincent Scully's analysis of the Greek theater. The siting reveals a feature in the distant horizon, in this case it is the cleft and the horn in the mountains. And viewing those features was very important to their under-

standing. It's about everything in that culture, from sexuality, to fertility to the culture of the gods. That was the larger focus. In Jefferson's UVa campus, where the opening is focused towards the larger mountains, it's: here's the campus and there's the bigger world. A different context grounds you. And it's done in Salk. A channel of water points out to the ocean and the openness of that landscape. These examples embody this two-pronged approach we have to take, I think, as a sensibility.

This strategy reminds us of the need to set our goals and priorities in a very broad context, by opening our eyes to (literally) the "big picture" in a way that captures the imagination. Olmsted's design of Boston's "Emerald Necklace" of urban parks was based on an analysis of its urban waterways—and helps Bostonians make sense of their environment by letting them see how the Fens are connected to the Charles River. This kind of intra-city orientation using connected sites is critical to the legibility of urban life—it made the simple idea of a linear park into a broader conceptual model of a city with a water-borne circulation system. Other examples include the Woodlands new town near Houston, Texas, which used natural surface drainage instead of storm sewers to control flooding—while providing recreational corridors, wildlife habitat, a highly-desirable residential aesthetic, and reducing infrastructure costs; while a project which I worked on recently in eastern Germany used linear parks as an infrastructure for monitoring and remediating groundwater pollution around a large city. All of these projects started with the site, using priorities developed from a combination of cultural myths and natural processes to interpret it and evolve a dimensioned, structural approach to providing architectural form.

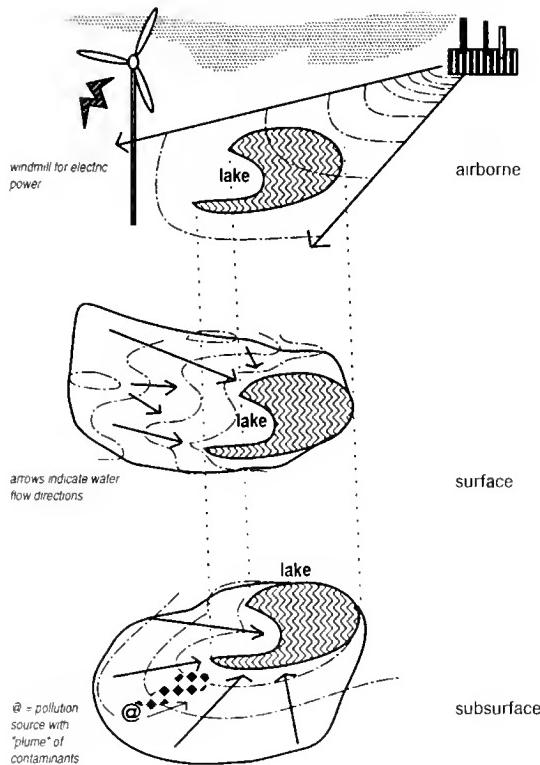
I don't think these examples represent new forms. But I do think they represent the use of existing forms in new ways. That's a critical piece of what designers can do to promote sustainability—using well-known forms in innovative ways. It represents a kind of spatial strategic thinking that lets the designer draw on the history of how a form has been used to come up with new functions, and therefore generate more complex meanings for the form,



**opposite** Salk Institute sketch, Louis Kahn

**top** University of Virginia, Thomas Jefferson, Charlottesville, Virginia 1819-26, engraving 1856

**above** The axis of the Acropolis with the Horns of Hymettos (from Vincent Scully)



which may shift the way people understand its functions over time.

**ed** Now, in your Germany project you do this. Is this associated to the two pronged approach?

**KH** In Germany I was trying to invent new functions in and for common forms. And that is the two pronged association to this work. The linear park aspect is not a new concept by any means, but the underground functional aspect of it is different than the common. Given the two schools of thought about meaning, Phenomenology vs. collective storytelling, folklore, or collective meaning, I think that collective storytelling is really the source of meaning.

Meaning derives from the stories people tell in groups, as groups, not from a symbol, and some fundamental, phenomenological reaction a person has to a given symbol, say a circle, fire or a square. Its about groups telling stories. What happened at a certain place, the meaning it has in their lives, what occurred at a certain time that was really extraordinary to them. These stories, that's

where meaning comes from. I rely on the story telling for interpretation. I think that the phenomenological approach is interesting but a distraction. I rely on groups gathering and interacting with things, not on an analysis that the circle is the symbol of this, or fire of that. And that's a big change from the earth art of the 1970s, the Spiral Jetty for example, that really relies on the phenomenological aspect of what they were doing. I want things that mean something and do something. I want things that work. I guess I'm very MIT in that way.

So in Germany a system of underground, hidden dikes could prevent the existing ground water conditions from ever contaminating the city supply. I proposed a system of linear parks, as common forms, that act as dikes, both literally and metaphorically, below. These hydraulic walls created by pumping wells in underground canopies prevent contamination. A wall of unseen wells in overlapping, upside-down "umbrellas," prevents that contamination from overcoming the wall of the wells. The linear parks above, then, look nothing like, but act metaphorically as, a medieval wall spatial analogy. It is in this way that I set goals and priorities in a very broad context, and with common elements redefined, opened our eyes (literally), to the big picture of water quality in a way that captures the imagination.

**ed** With your ideas on where meaning comes from, can you suggest some terms stemming from landscape and ecology that are missing from or are poorly defined in an architect or urban planner's glossary of concepts?

**KH** Some of the most commonly misused terms are "natural" (often confused with a romantic ideal or aesthetic), "ecological" (often confounded with "environmentalism" and other political and social philosophies), and also "sustainable," "healthy," and "habitat" are frequently used in ways which confuse priorities, hopes, and hypotheses.

**ed** Do you find that our ability to look at examples of "irresponsible development" perhaps sharpens our skills or provides a better definition of the problems at stake?

**KH** I think you have to learn two processes. In the studio, I want to teach how to go beyond conventional practice. But you have to teach what is the conventional practice first. In a way students don't know what that is yet. You have to get to the point of simply comparing what are the consequences of a conventional plan, and what are the consequences of an innovative one in the real world. Take a plan that tries to improve the ground water quality while developing. You have to ask: one might do well on a marketing scale, while the other might do much better on environmental benefits. So making sense of your own position on what the future priorities might be is important.

I think just looking at the problems with the conventional approach can give the student the sense that we can't do it right. If you use successful programs to critique unsuccessful programs then the student gets the sense that everyone could be doing this right, if they learn what's working. I'd look at what's working and see if they cover all their bases, and ask where they could be extended, made strategic as well as environmental.

**ed** You seem to frequently mention that strategy is very important. Are architects and landscape architects renewing their own strategies in response to territory shared with (or missing from) the others?

**KH** In either discipline, landscape or architecture, the talented ones, the ones who are really going to be effective, see their practice more as strategic. I think that design professionals who are going to succeed are doing this.

They see it less as wedging yourself to a discipline, than as redefining what practice is going to be in general. For example, we used to think when you go to a meeting with the client, you would bring three versions of your scheme. You'd say: "You know, we could do A...", and the client's face would look not too pleased. So you'd take that one away real quick and say; "Or! We can do B!" And the client was still not happy . And so you'd show "C". And you were hoping they liked that one, and you kind of saved the best one for last anyway.

But I think now we go into a meeting knowing this is really more of a probabilistic process. We might think, OK, here are the anchor points that we're building a form with,

and then here's what we think might happen, or, might happen, around it. And, importantly, here's how your development will be adaptable to that fluctuating economic impact—and when I say economy, I mean the *real* economy, that which includes environmental costs.

So the target of architects and landscape architects is really outside both fields. It's really a strategy of: "what will make each project effective?" And this *is* economic. So it's more of a triangle: landscape, architecture, the economy of it. The two disciplines are really trying to position themselves appropriately in the triangle to be strategic.

Also I think there is a sharing here. Landscape architects have traditionally been very vulnerable in making any intellectual statement of what they're doing. They're more practice than theory oriented. Architecture people have brought more intellectual spark.

Landscape architects have brought a whole sense of process. They've said you're not designing a thing—you're designing a thing in a changing context, itself part of the process. You're designing a thing that is meant to survive a fluctuating economy. Landscape architects know it has to be more about change over time because their designs always do change over time.

## Gray-areas in Green Politics:

### Reflections on the Modern Environmental Movement

Panayiota Pyla

"The phrase 'only one earth' was born on the Apollo 8 mission circling the moon. The image of the tiny earth with the moon in the foreground, simultaneously shown on TV sets around the globe, changed man's cosmic view of his home."<sup>1</sup>

The environmental consciousness that emerged in the 1960s as scientific research brought to the forefront the realities of the earth's finite resources has in the past few years come under scrutiny, while the ecological movements of that time now seem unsophisticated in their enthusiasm, and ideologically suspect. Key contributions to earlier ecological movements, such as Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962), known as the "watershed of the modern environmental movement" because it infiltrated public sentiment by exposing the excesses of industrial agriculture; Buckminster Fuller's *Whole Earth Catalog* which emphasized the fear of ecological crisis; and Constantinos Doxiades's *Ekistics* (1968) which aimed to define how built settlements would be sensitive to the global ecosystem: each of these positions assumed that the natural environment has a stable "ecological balance" which needs to be preserved, and each sought to establish a "harmonious" interdependence among humans and nature.

The assumptions behind modern environmental movements, contemporary critics argue, obscure "the social relations and priorities that go into environmental practices,"<sup>2</sup> and depoliticize environmental matters. The book *Uncommon Ground: Toward Reinventing Nature* (edited by William Cronon, 1995), which is a collection of essays by leading environmentalists across disciplines, presents some the most persuasive challenges against the modern envi-

ronmental movement of the 1960s. This book demonstrates that far from being "universal," conceptions of nature are tacitly associated with political structures of cultural domination, racial biases, social beliefs, class divisions or gender politics. Each of the book's articles reveals the complex entanglement of the "natural" with the "human" world and uncovers how the constructed dualism between the two is not simply false but politically prejudiced. William Cronon's article, for example, demonstrates that wealthy suburbanites who protest the farmers who "exploit nature," do not represent an untainted concern for the destruction of nature's "balance." Rather, their "environmental" arguments are predicated on class biases, and in their in their righteous protectionism threaten to deprive the farmer of his/her living.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, Candace Slater's article "Amazonia as Edenic Narrative" uncovers how popular notions which pigeonhole the Yanomani Indians as an intrinsic part of their "natural" environment fail to recognize the needs of this tribe as a human culture. Dominant tendencies to exoticize this tribe of Amazonia as "natural," Slater argues, are predicated on romantic paradisal and Edenic images, and dehumanize a place with thousands of inhabitants. (fig. 1)

Expositions of tacit political and power dynamics, such as those of *Uncommon Ground*, promise to empower those who have been suppressed by essentializing concepts of

nature. Yet these insights are at once enlightening and hindering for the purposes of environmentalism.<sup>4</sup> In uncovering the political partialities of earlier environmental movements and in uprooting any transcultural understanding of nature, current analyzes do not only relativize nature, but also relativize the concerns about the environment, and may end up turning them into political issues alone.

The predicament behind the politics of environmentalism was most striking in a recent BBC-World Service Report about an international summit on nuclear proliferation. The radio correspondent meticulously accounted for all the positions voiced by the parties at the summit: The Russian representative asserted that nuclear reactors in Russia were operating within "established safety specifications"; the British prime minister, in turn, doubted this assertion; the French envoy confined himself to impossibly ambiguous remarks; and "the Environmentalists," the BBC correspondent continued, categorically demanded that most of the nuclear reactors scattered around the former USSR countries be closed immediately because they are older and in worse condition than Chernobyl.

It may be a substantial success for those "environmentalists" represented in the summit to have their voice heard along with the opinions of top Government officials from many countries. However, by inserting themselves within the international political spectrum, these environmentalists were constituted as a political entity, and their position was represented in the media as one of the many political voices. In the process, environmental concerns become a political posture, which obscures the fact that if another "Chernobyl-type" disaster happens, everybody (whatever their politics) will be affected.

This predicament is acknowledged by the authors of *Uncommon Ground*. Despite their systematic expositions of "the multiple natures of that thing we are quick to call

## Brazil Creates Reserve for Imperiled Amazon Tribe

By JAMES BROOKES

SÃO PAULO Nov. 17—Overriding mining interests and military pressure, President Fernando Collor de Mello has agreed to reserve a stretch of Amazon rain forest in Brazil for the Yanomami Indians, a tribe virtually untouched by modern civilization who inhabit the Amazon basin.

The new reserve, coupled with a slightly smaller park across the border in Venezuela, will allow the Yanomami, South America's last uncontacted tribe, to roam freely over 64,321 square miles of Amazon wildness.

"We struggled for 20 years for what has just happened," said Claudio Andrade, a Yanomami leader who helped found the Creation of a Yanomami Park, a private group based in Venezuela.

With the fate of South America's 23,000 Yanomami Indians in international cause, Napoleon A. Chagnon, an American anthropologist, reached worldwide fame. In 1988, Mr. Chagnon, then 70, told reporters when he said in a telephone interview: "This will go a long way to making cultural survival of the Yanomami a reality possibility."

**Military Resists Move**

But not everyone was clapping in Brazil on Friday when Mr. Collor signed a decree reserving 14,000 of Brazil's 100,000 Yanomami. About 50,000 Yanomami live in Venezuela. At the signing ceremony, Gen. Carlos Timoco, the Army chief of staff, stood by, abstaining from joining the applause.

Charguing that foreign interests were trying to steal their land, the Yanomami natives, influential elements of Brazil's military have argued that Brazil should clear a 10-mile wide belt of its Amazonian frontier to protect Yanomami from Venezuela's Yanomami.

Searching for a middle ground after the collapse of the International Conference, Brazil's conservation generals are increasingly taking nationalist stances on

the Amazon's ecology and purity of some 600 million acres in order to keep dormant the potential of the Brazilian Amazon, warned a recent study by the Superior War College, Brazil's elite military school.

Describing Indians and other reserves as "liberated zones" used to contain "subversives" and "militant elements," the study predicted: "It would take a great Brazilian effort for their elimination, probably with the help of the U.S."

But the army's political standing has been weakened in recent days by news paper reports of fixed bidding practices for quarrying contracts.

Rebutting the army's national security arguments, Mr. Collor announced last week that he was abolishing Brazil's monarchy in 1889.

Brazilian democracy continues to stand after seven reversals. Mr. Collor

said the park two weeks ago, he approved 21 other Indian reserves, covering 42,471 square miles.

Mr. Collor ignored economic objections raised by governors of two states where the park will be located, Amazonas and Roraima.

Rich in gold, tin, diamonds and zinc,

the park area is virtually pattered with

gold requests by mining companies for exploration rights. Once an area is declared an Indian reserve, mining companies can apply for permits, individual communities and even a small Indian protection agency. Final

decisions are left to the Indians.



Single-Handedly

Invented by Breguet, the "Jung Hour" automatic watch, with hour display and minute hand. Crafted in platinum with a porcelain dial, from a limited series numbered by the maker, \$46,000. Enlarged to show detail.

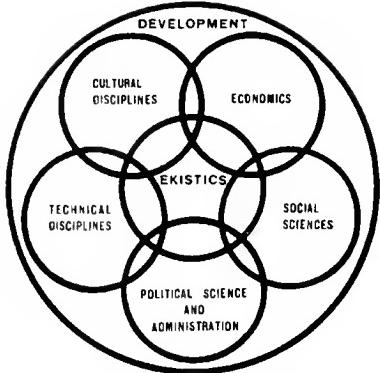
**TIFFANY & CO.**

NEW YORK, FIFTH AVENUE AND 57TH STREET, AT THE PLAZA, DE 6-10-1991

nature," many of the authors in *Uncommon Ground*, point out that "nature" as the non-human world does, after all, exist. Along with her expositions of the gender biases behind modern meta-narratives about nature, Carolyn Merchant, for instance, also declares that "the environmental crisis is real" and that "the vanishing frogs, fish, songbirds are telling us the truth."<sup>5</sup> This warning exemplifies the ambivalence of the author who recognizes that once nature is presented as an ideologically determined concept, and the protection of the environment is perceived as a political tactic, then there is a danger that we lose sight of threats that are caused by the destruction of the environment, threats that exist beyond the realm of relativity and the politics of knowledge.

To tackle this predicament, I propose to reconsider the premises of the modern environmental movement and to explore how its insights could help rethink environmentalism as a critical attitude for the present. Using "Ekistics" as a representative case for the environmental consciousness that emerged in the sixties, I reflect both on the inadequa-

**fig 1** A New York Times article that promotes the common preconception that the Yanomami Indians are "natural" parts of the land. Slater refers to it and also points to the irony that this article is accompanied by a Tiffany & Co advertisement, which underlines the rigid juxtaposition between the Yanomami as part of nature, and the "modern civilization" as part of "culture."



**fig 2** The larger vision of Ekistics was to combine all disciplines to outline a comprehensive plan for global development.

cies of modern environmental thought and on its contributions. While rejecting universalistic and essentializing conceptions of nature, I try to negotiate between the aspirations of earlier environmental thought and later critiques of it. My goal is not to reinstate an anachronistic ecological approach, but to circumscribe current positions on environmentalism in such a way that their liberating force can extend to the realm of praxis.

“Ekistics,” was one of the first theories that introduced environmental concerns into the realm of architecture and planning. Developed by the Greek urban planner Constantinos Doxiades (1913-1975) in the late fifties, Ekistics—the “Science of Human Settlements”—was an interdisciplinary theory aimed at outlining methods for structuring an economically and ecologically viable urbanized world for the future. (The term “Ekistics,” coined by Doxiades himself, is derived from the Greek word *oikos*, meaning home, and has the same roots as the word “Ecology.”) Doxiades’s theory of Ekistics had a tremendous impact around the world: By the mid-sixties, it was taught in universities; it formed the basis for government programs on urban development in the US, Italy, Greece, Brazil, Lebanon, Pakistan, Iraq, and other countries; and it was incorporated in the agenda of the Habitat, the United Nations conference on Human settlements.

Doxiades’s Ekistics represents the ideas of architectural modernism in its more critical stage, when it began to temper the optimism for technological progress with environmental awareness and anxiety about the earth’s over-population and finite resources.<sup>7</sup> In his books and in the Journal *Ekistics*,<sup>8</sup> Doxiades gave a terrifying portrait of the environmental “catastrophe” that awaits if no systematic “plan of action” is taken for a more “sensible” utilization of earth’s resources. He passionately emphasized the need to sustain “the ecological balance.” The goal of Ekistics was to outline a global system of development that would make a wise use of the environment, by reconciling, Doxiades argued, “the human efforts for growth and development” with the limitations of a “finite world.” Ekistics intended to respond to massive construction demands around the world promoting, as Doxiades argued, “social and economic development” (e.g., post-war reconstruction for Europe, housing for South America, urban institutions for the emerging states in the Middle East); at the same time, Ekistics would outline how built environments could remain sensitive to the vulnerability of nature.<sup>9</sup> (fig. 2)

Similar to Rachel Carson’s method of analyzing the relationships between living organisms and their surroundings, Ekistics studied the relationship between built settlements and the natural setting and attempted outline a problem-solving process for global planning that defined how settlements should be planned in balance with nature. “Human settlements” (notice, the universalistic connotations of the very term) were treated as organisms having a reciprocal relationship with their larger environment. Resource and environmental management became central to the Ekistic method of planning in order to defend the natural and built environment. Doxiades created meticulous scientific charts that calculated the resources in a place and specified material-types to be used in different areas, methods for underground water distribution, rules for land distribution for different regions, etc. Ekistics then inserted these specifications into calculations about the

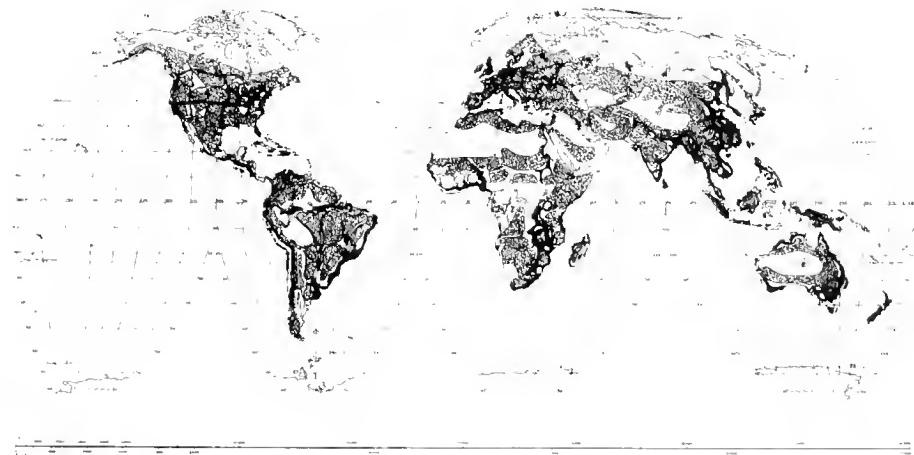
ecological balance of a specific place and the globe at large.<sup>9</sup> (fig. 3)

The widespread acceptance of the Ekistic theory and its worldwide implementation as an environmentally sensitive planning method depended very much on the presentation of Doxiades's technical and managerial consulting as a rational, disinterested analysis, detached from the specific locale it studied. This "detachment" concealed political questions of power and inequality into technical issues of natural resources and their management. With rhetoric such as "action needs to be taken" Doxiades systematically concealed by whom the required action would be taken. In most cases, Doxiades's decisions were confined within established governmental agendas, which were, in turn, often funded by private US agencies operating around the world. Far from being democratically determined, Doxiades's decisions on where housing should be built, or how dense it should be, failed to address the needs of the less privileged in a society.<sup>10</sup> Imposing strict zoning separations in the name of environmental efficiency, Doxiades remained oblivious to the social inequalities inherent in these territorial divisions, and even exacerbated them.<sup>11</sup> This is the irony of the purported neutrality of such "ecologically conscious" urban ordering: the proclaimed

aim to protect of natural assets, trees and scenery and to improve local climate, camouflaged the reality of segregation of the poor from the upper classes.<sup>12</sup>

As we come to see the specifics of the Ekistic theory, we can recognize in it elements emblematic of both the strengths and weaknesses of the modern environmental sensibility. The modern environmentalists' attempts to systematically capture, order and objectify ecological processes often overlooked dominant power structures, and exacerbated social and cultural inequalities. Yet their pioneering institution of ecological sensitivity, their call for prudent utilization of local resources, and their regard to global needs for housing and infrastructure could continue to bring to focus the crucial issues that affect many parts of the world today. (fig. 4) While their all-encompassing, classificatory charts must be criticized for constructing regions as bounded, determinate and controllable objects of study, they actively propelled a systematic investigation of the limitations of the earth's resources.

Indeed, despite the pitfalls of modern environmental approaches, their larger aspirations can exercise a refreshing critique against overzealous relativizations of environmental problems. Whether earlier efforts such as Doxiades'



**fig 3** Ecumenokepos or, Global Garden, Doxiades's vision of the world in the future. According to Doxiades's calculations, most of the land on earth could be available for cultivation or could be left undisturbed for "wildlife".



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Fuller's or Carson's succeeded or failed is less important now than the fact that, like the environment itself, their premises reach beyond the realm of relativity into supra-political concerns. It is in this spirit that modern environmental thought can offer critical orientations to current environmental predicaments. I would argue for a radical re-evaluation that would negotiate the overlaps between the modern consciousness and current critical thought, not so much to regain the conviction of earlier movements, but to redirect the admirable energy and sophistication of current critiques towards more effective directions. Current critical thought could disentangle environmental approaches from an all-encompassing, universalistic and rationalist framework of thought, while the aspirations of ecological sensitivity would not be consumed by total relativism.

To illustrate how the negotiation between current critiques and earlier ecological premises could be constructive, consider once again, Slater's deconstruction of "Edenic Narratives" in *Uncommon Ground* which has been quite convincing is showing that:

"It is well worth asking not just how we can save the rain forest but why we want to do so. Whom do we wish to benefit? And why focus our efforts on Amazonia instead of Africa, Antarctica, or Northern California? Before we try to answer these essential questions, however, we

**fig 4** One of the projects of Doxiades Associates that utilized local resources in an effort to improve Sudan's infrastructure.

must ask what we mean by 'the rain forest'. What exactly do we think we want to safeguard?"

Consider, also, the leap from these insightful remarks to the conclusion that immediately follows them, a leap which threatens to nullify efforts for environmental protection:

"It will be hard enough to reverse the acrid course of recent history in Amazonia. But it is impossible to rescue something that does not exist"<sup>13</sup>

Indeed, to use Slater's own terms, we should not be "quick" to call something "nature"; but, neither should we be so quick in dismissing "nature" as something that does not exist. If critiques such as Slater's aim to argue that environmental approaches "impinge...not just on trees and animals but on countless human lives" they should do this without paralyzing efforts to prevent environmental destruction, because such destruction would also impinge on "human lives." In the case of Slater's argument, the destruction of the Amazon region would affect, among others, the Yanomani Indians themselves.

While any efforts to protect the Amazon region should guard against tendencies to essentialize the traditional lifestyle of the Yanomani Indians as an intrinsic part of "nature," the ecological problems around the Amazon should not themselves be entirely relativized. The need to

respond to environmental destruction should remain in focus, even though we should guard against any attempt to collapse "protective measures" onto nostalgic preconceptions of a romantic "nature" that would treat local cultures as voiceless observers of external environmental measures imposed on them. Environmental responses would need to be actively negotiated with the complexities and demands of the local culture, engaging with the politics of difference and the fluid realities of "nature" and "culture." The complex actualities of difference would reinforce, rather than replace, ecological sensitivity.

What I am arguing then is that critiques of the modern environmental movement come not as dismissals but as extensions of it. In this way environmentalism could transcend relativism, while highlighting the dangers of essentialism and universalism. Perhaps the most radical responses to environmental questions cannot emanate from overzealous rejections of an earlier environmental consciousness, but from a negotiated position; one which operates "in-between," aiming to remain vigilantly critical without losing the capacity to act.

1 From the Journal *Ekistics* 208, March 1973, p.114.

2 Yaakov Garb, "Rachel Carson's Silent Spring" in *Dissent*, Fall 1995, p.541.

3 See William Cronon, "Introduction: In Search of Nature" and "The Trouble with Wilderness" in W. Cronon ed. *Uncommon Ground*, W.W. Norton & Company: New York and London, 1995.

4 "Environmentalism" encompasses diverse positions which can be intensely antagonistic to one another. For the purposes of this essay, however, I use the terms "environmentalism" and "environmentalists" in the broadest possible sense, to refer to any movements, organized groups or even individuals who are actively concerned with environmental protection.

5 Carolyn Merchant, "Reinventing Eden: Western Culture as a Recovery Narrative" in *Uncommon Ground*, p.157.

6 Ivan Pedro de Martins captures very well the context in which Doxiades operated: "...two aspects of knowledge coincided in

the circles of science and later of policy-making: the knowledge of the planet as a container for mankind and for the resources that allow human life, and the exhaustion of certain fundamental products in the foreseeable future, a generation hence, such as oil; a crisis that is bringing home to millions a sense of danger and the eagerness to challenge it through a rational approach to the ecological problem." (Ivan Pedro de Martins, "Random Factors: Ekistics, Ecology and a Think Tank: An approach to Settlement Planning from Doxiades Onwards", in *Third World Planning Review*, Vol.2, No.2, Autumn 1980, p.139)

7 The journal *Ekistics* (founded in 1955 and still in circulation) was, during the sixties, edited in Cambridge, MA and circulated in 94 countries.

8 Ekistics attempted to combine numerous disciplines in the design of human settlements: in addition to ecology, it took into account economic, psychological and sociological factors. For the purposes of this essay, however, I will focus on those aspects of the Ekistic theory that attempted to connect urban design to ecological concerns.

9 Many of Doxiades's ideas on this subject were compiled in his later book *Ecology and Ekistics* (1977).

10 His plan of Islamabad, for example—a plan which inserted the Capital of Pakistan into an ecologically conscious global schema—overlooked the questions of power and inequality between the local regime and the various classes of the population. See Lawrence Vale, *Architecture, Power and National Identity*.

11 In his restructuring of Athens, for example, Doxiades claimed that his plan would make the city more efficient in order to minimize the destruction of the environment surrounding the city. People, he argued, should be housed close to their work-place in order to minimize pollution from transportation. (See Doxiades, *Our Capital and Its Future*, 1960) Yet, how was this "environmental concern" connected to his decision to relocate lower-class workers at the industrial area of Eleusina and to leave the privileged fringes of the Penteli mountain to the high government officials?

12 Doxiades's proposals also concealed larger cultural dynamics: The insertion of the new towns in Iraq or Islamabad into the megastructure of a global interconnected ecosystem assumed a transcultural uniformity in the model of urbanization, and did not consider the questions of inequality and cultural imperialism in global relationships. Similarly, Doxiades never acknowledged the influence of western funding institutions on his decisions to promote certain agricultural developments and to abandon others. The universal claims that Doxiades's "scientific" and "ecological" approach made, depoliticized his interventions which were nevertheless inevitably tied to such issues as land distribution, allocation of resources, class divisions, and transcultural power dynamics.

13 Slater, in *Uncommon Ground*, p.130.

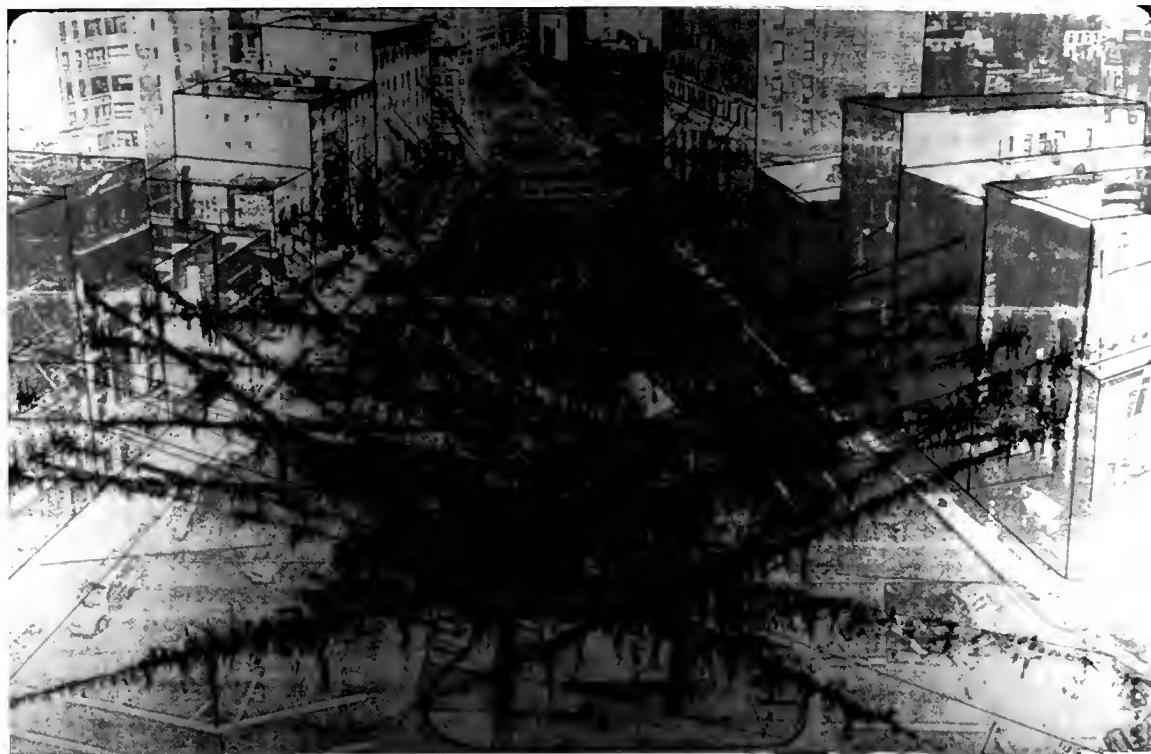


Conservation campaigns have long relied on photogenic animals or scenic beauty to raise funds, as with these Canadian Wildlife Federation holiday stamps



## **Wolf Lake Landscape**

*Wolf Lake, Indiana*



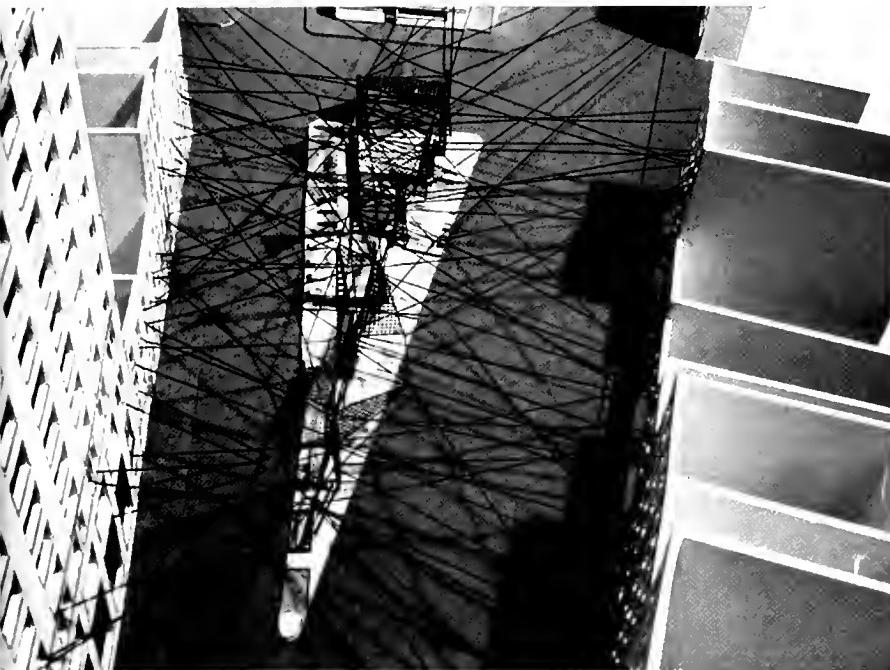
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Our approach to the design of residual spaces in New York City celebrates the fortuitous interactions possible between the city's diverse cultural climate, the spatial dynamics of left over open space, and nature. Applying the flexibility of natural structures and systems to the building of public space in the city, we arrive at a design which cultivates discovery through its ability to adapt to seasonal changes and new input from the surrounding community. The park structure should function like an armature for the expression of different cultural identities and the random flourishing of plant life. This potential for transformation and evolution fosters a more dynamic and empowering relationship between the inhabitants, their urban environment, and nature.

## Lt. Petrosino Park

Azin Valy & Suzan Wines

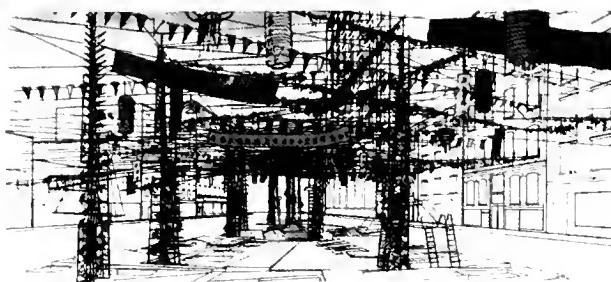
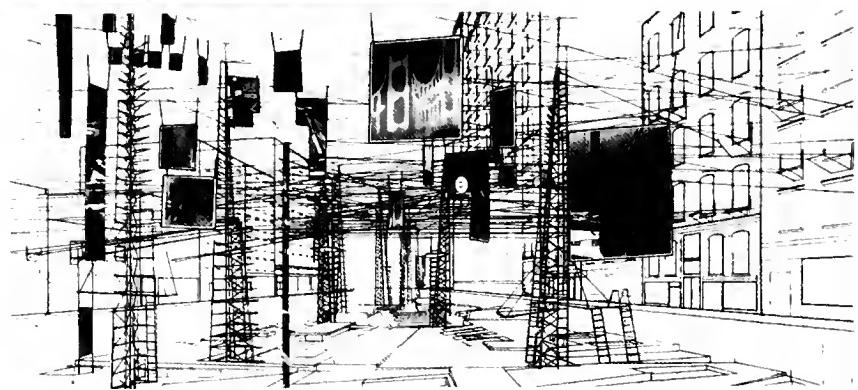
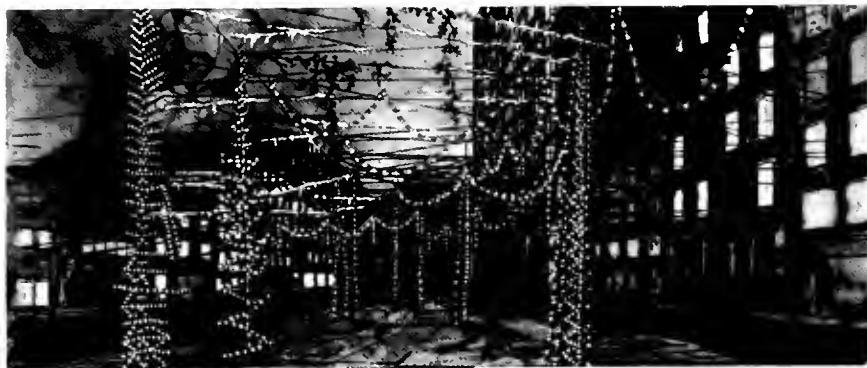


These principals were first developed in our Lt. Petrosino park competition entry which was one of three winning proposals. Final decision on that park is still pending New York City Parks Department approval. However, the basic concept could be adapted to any number of pocket sites in New York or other cities with similar spatial and social dynamics. For us the solution to improving these kinds of spaces is as much about bringing the park directly to the community as bringing the community to the park.

The proposed design creates a programmatic, cultural and spatial connection between Lt. Petrosino park and its surroundings. A hanging garden extends from the facades of the surrounding buildings to a series of columns within the park. Neighboring residents are invited to participate directly from their windows in selecting, growing and planting the flowering vines and ivy which constitute the garden. This simple gesture provides animated patterns of light and shade at street level, and a view of the entire street through a levitating tapestry of rich greenery and brightly colored flowers from the windows above.

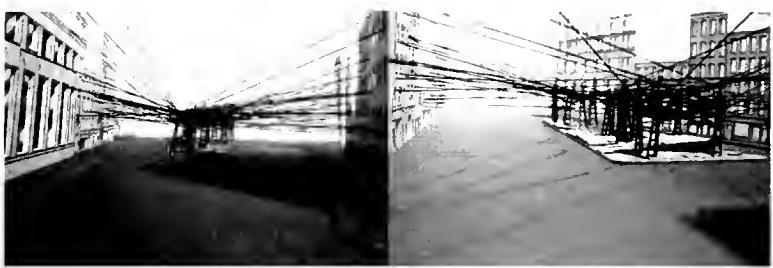
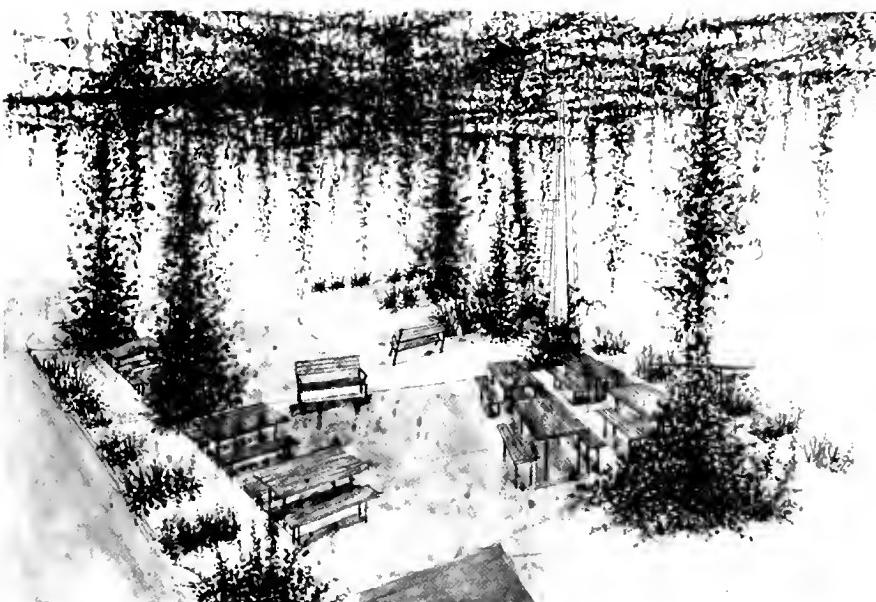
The existing 3500 square foot park is located at the intersection of Lafayette and Kenmare streets at the threshold between Chinatown, Little Italy and Soho. The simple framework of cables and columns also provides an ideal structure for a variety of community interventions. The Italian community may decorate the columns and cables with shimmering lights





during the San Gennaro Festival or Christmas, while the Chinese could use the park for hanging elaborately colored lanterns or dragons during the Chinese New Year festivities. During the summer local artists may hang projection screens for film and video festivals or create sculptural works that use the columns as a structural base. Participation may be as passive as simply smelling the flowers at the window or as active as designing special features for park events and the customization of one's own window box. The design of the structure and landscape allows the park to function like a flexible extension of New York City's urban fabric, incorporating a variety of diverse contributions into an ever-changing collage of city culture and vegetation.

By using the sky plane as a garden, the design reduces noise and air pollution to the surrounding residences and puts planting out of the reach of vandals, allowing for an open rather than a gated and locked communal garden as is typical of New York City. Spatially the pergola serves to integrate the streets, sidewalks and building facades into the park, creating a kind of giant exterior room whose walls, floor, and ceiling are alive with the energy of the community. Within the park, areas for seating, playing and entertainment are integrated into a playful unfolding landscape of paving, planting and water that inspires joy and interaction between people and the parkscape itself. This is a living park, transformed each season by the imagination of its users.



## **Passages** Some Notes on the Fusion of Buildings and Landscape

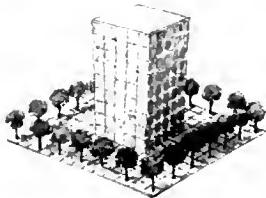
*James Wines*



60

From an ecological perspective, mainstream architecture and landscape architecture for the past two decades have sent out mostly confusing messages. The values communicated to urban dwellers seem to endorse a discard attitude toward nature and a view that "the earth" is a place where one drives to on the weekend; but, upon return to the city, never associates with the design of buildings and spaces, or the serious enterprises of daily life.

As a result of designers' obsessive commitment to this century's earlier industrial/technological dream, the relationship between buildings and landscape is still dominated by the formalist traditions of early Modernist design—meaning that the edifice is seen as the star and vegetation is treated as peripheral decor. There seems to be a paranoid fear among architects that foliage might upstage the building. In visual terms, this phobia usually results in a rigid and separatist compositional hierarchy; where architecture is regarded as a kind of centerpiece sculpture and landscaping is reduced to a girdle of lollipop trees. This attitude has taken a negative toll on urban aesthetic; but, more irrationally, it has been bad for business and even worse for community well-being. The bottom line is simply that abundant garden spaces attract people to linger in city centers, thus improving commerce. From a health standpoint, one tree absorbs 26 pounds of carbon dioxide and this means four people can breathe. In large part, a city's fundamental quality of life can be determined by an equation between the number of people and a proportional quantity of trees.



During the past few years, it has become increasingly apparent that architecture is desperately in need of a reunion with the natural environment and a total re-evaluation of its conceptual, philosophical, and aesthetic priorities over the next decade. This does not simply mean more urban greening and conservation efforts—although these are obviously urgent issues—but, more importantly, it indicates the necessity for a radically increased awareness of the “integrated systems” found in nature and the capacity to interpret them from a contextual and artistic perspective. All of the building arts today should connect in some physical and iconographic way to a new green sensibility. This suggests a response to social, psychological, cultural, topographical, as well as botanical, influences. It also proposes the development of an expanded definition of “environmental thinking” over the next decade.

It seems inevitable that architecture must exchange its roots in Modernist and Constructivist design, abstract art, and Industrial Age imagery for a more open ended visual language, consistent with the emerging Age of Information and Ecology. For example, people's reflex reactions to contemporary life have been shaped by a pervasive “ambient sensibility,”

created by television, cinema, computer science, and an awareness of the consequences of environmental destruction. This consensus is a natural generator of subliminal references that have little in common with the industrial and technological sources that shaped early Modern Design. As a result, it appears logical that buildings and their adjoining spaces should no longer be conceived strictly from the standpoint of form, space, and structure; but, instead, change the emphasis to narrative and environmental associations. In this way, architecture can deal more directly with new sources of content, a higher level of eco-consciousness, and a greater responsibility to earth-related issues. This shift of focus from physical/hermetic to mental/environmental seems consistent with both the informational and ecological revolutions. It also opens up the building arts and landscape design to a range of options that have been closed off for most of this century.





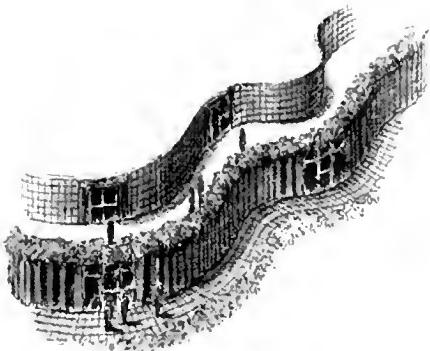
**Max Reinhardt Haus,  
Eisenman Architects**

Currently, a great deal of post-Structuralist philosophy in architecture is turning away from references to deconstruction and chaos theory, in favor of "integrated systems" that could be considered more in concert with the so-called information highway and ecology movement. One recent direction, referred to as "folding," is being described with such terms as "pliancy, continuous and heterogeneous systems, fluid transformations, and smooth mixtures of disparate elements." While some of this dialogue seems to suggest a renewed sympathy for the organic architecture of Frank Lloyd Wright, the actual manifestations in built and model form (unlike Wright) tend to treat the surrounding environment as an alien territory, generally populated by a grid of trees that bear little or no reference to the centerpiece building. Folding in architecture is typically characterized by formal exercises in the use of warped planar surfaces to alter conventional relationships between exterior and interior. Whatever its claims for "pliancy and fluidity"—the folded building still remains a familiar isolated object that can be readily photographed apart from its context, without a loss of meaning.

While some of the propositions of folding in architecture appear to be in accord with the new eco-sensitivity, there is no real "earth awareness" or intent to fuse

structure with context implied in its objectives. In fact, there are no references to even the most elementary responsibilities of conservation technology and sustainable design. Instead, like the appropriation of deconstruction as an apology for neo-constructivist stylistic tendencies, folding seems to be one more extension of twentieth century orthodox formalism; its representative examples are very much a part of the tradition of early Constructivism and the notion that a building must always be some form of abstract sculpture—in this case, comparable to a kind of architectural origami.

One interesting linguistic contribution of folding in architecture is an expansion of the meaning of "information" to "in-Formation," which implies a fusion of both the transmission of data and the developmental process of shaping ideas. This thought leads directly to the main focus here, the interpretation of architecture as a system of "passages." It is a concept that links buildings, landscape, and elements of social/contextual/environmental communication. Edifices designed on strictly formal terms and then plunked down to await a bracelet of peripheral vegetation tend to remain static and insular. Buildings conceived as integrations of structure and landscape are mutable,



metamorphic, and evolutionary, constantly conveying new levels of information.

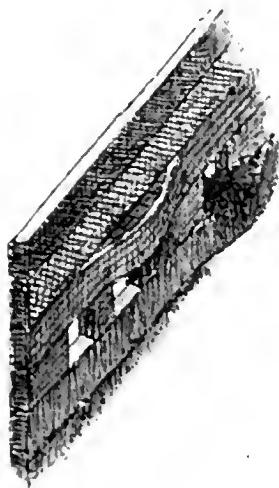
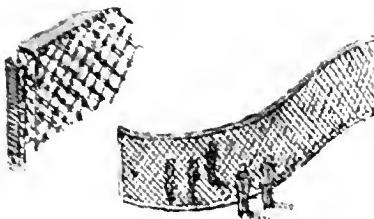
One way of looking at the integration of architecture and landscape architecture might be based, in part, on an observation about television. The TV set in one's living room is seldom regarded as anything more than a generic artifact for receiving and disseminating electronically generated images. Usually a viewer does not even notice the physical receptacle as an example of good or bad design, nor as an important object of furniture (although it can obviously be both). Instead, the importance of the ubiquitous box is its capacity to process information. Applying the same principles to a building in relation to its context—and offering a way of breaking free from the strictly formalist interpretation of architecture—it is more productive to shift the aesthetic focus of a building to its capacity to absorb and transmit messages. This suggests that walls, instead of being seen mainly as barriers of enclosure or compositional elements, can serve as information-filtering partitions (or points of passage) that fuse and dissolve traditional inside/outside relationships and incorporate narrative commentary. There is nothing new about the idea of walls delivering messages—all of the Medieval and Renaissance churches and civic buildings of Europe were based on

walls for Saudi Arabian National Museum project

(top) tile and ceramic walls

(middle) perforated metal exhibition wall

(bottom) banded walls with various materials



this objective—but, its radical appeal today derives from an opposition to conventional architectural geometry and the rich potential to establish landscape and environmental awareness as leading forces of change in response to the new Age of Ecology.

The interpretation of passages is infinitely variable and should not be considered as any kind of design formula. Basically, the concept proposes that walls and floor planes in a building should be seen as fluid, contextually responsive membranes, converting the measure of aesthetic quality in architecture from evaluations of formal design to how well a structure reflects and engages various aspects of landscape, regional identity, topography, and cultural references. In orthodox Modernist/Constructivist architecture, walls are usually treated as functional/sculptural elements that have an aesthetic significance derived from abstract art and are contained by the clearly defined perimeters of a floor plan. Walls as passages can appear to defy the plan and range in physicality and purpose from indeterminate ribbons of transition in space to monitors of social/environmental change.

In terms of architectural construction, the concept of passages proposes that plant life and earth elements should be as much a part of the physical substance of shelter as conventional building materials. From an

aesthetic standpoint, the objective is to look at the fusion of structure and landscape as a kind of interactive, biographical dialogue. When translated into a visual imagery, it describes their mutual origins in nature. This entire direction in design suggests the development of new paradigms in the building arts that are based on ecological models.

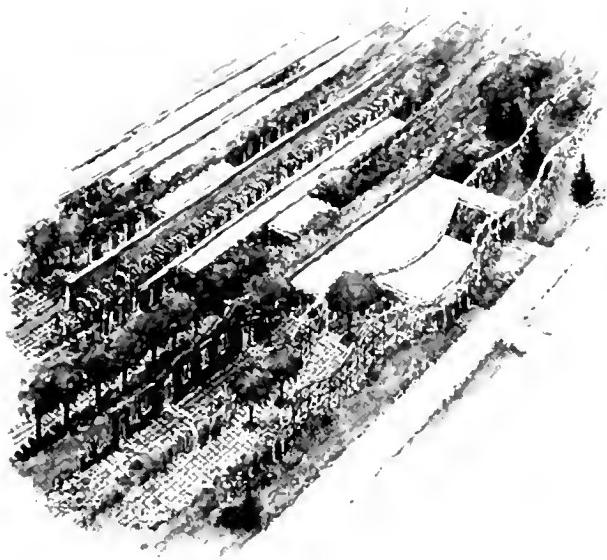
But there here are also obstacles to this objective. Since our society has no collectively shared cosmology or religious associations with nature—of the kind, for example, that built the Celtic monuments of Wiltshire or rock cut temples of Ajanta—designers of today's environment cannot rely on a consensus iconography for communication. At the same time, the earth and sun are still universal symbols and the global awareness of ecology has become a motivating psychological force in the development of a post-industrial version of Jung's "collective unconscious." In this context, landscape becomes the world's most potent source of symbolism.

Whereas the term folding in architecture seems to suggest a design process of methodical, geometry-driven, formal strategies; the notion of passages is intended to describe a mutational, organic, and informal set of connections between buildings and landscape. For example, this concept might take the form of a series of lateral, informational walls that can be distributed over a land parcel in both an orderly and random way, allowing roof structures and the surrounding context to casually bridge and/or penetrate the spaces between the partitions. This approach creates great flexibility in the orientation of sheltered services, as the covered areas can be distributed arbitrarily. Taken to its potential artistic extreme, it can completely break down the established definition of where architecture begins and landscape leaves off.



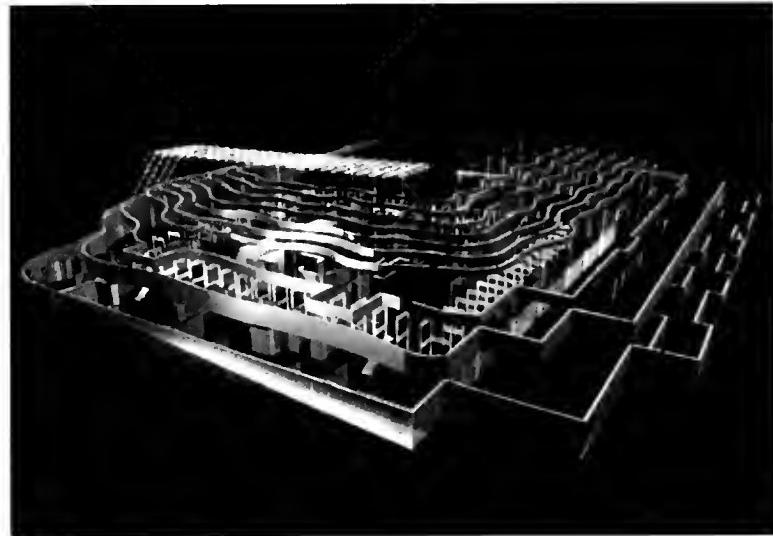
One major problem is trying to apply the theory of passages to a standard formula for highrise architecture. When the cost of real estate is the determining factor in ecological and aesthetic decisions, the idea of an office tower as the product of such nature-oriented design features as “fluidity, indeterminacy, and chance” is hard to sell. On the other hand, there is the possibility of interpreting large civic structures as heavily vegetated microcosms of their regions—taking cues from the Japanese concept of “borrowed scenery”—where they become tableaux of other places, or contemporary equivalents of the Gardens of Babylon. As a footnote to this issue of highrise construction, there is now a question of the viability of skyscrapers, since this building type has generally proven to be the most anti-ecological in terms of its use of resources and choice of construction technology. In fact, environmental protection laws may ultimately prohibit all high rise development in favor of lower height and clustered buildings, or mostly underground architecture.

Passages is a theory endeavoring to chart a cartographical route through new and sometimes conflicting territories. While there is plenty of platitudinous rhetoric now advocating integrated systems, the evidence on a vast majority of architects' and landscape architects' drawing boards reflects the same scenario of two cautious protagonists publicly professing a sympathy for collaboration; but, behind the scenes, jockeying for a position of aesthetic supremacy. Hopefully, by using the notion of passages as a critical tool and premise for revised thinking about the relationship between architecture and landscape, it can be viewed as a means of reversing anti-ecological and unproductive conventions in the building arts.



The present Age of Ecology is, like the spirit of passages, a critical point of transition and connection. It has arrived for some architects and landscape architects like a plague on the conscience, threatening entrenched beliefs, stylistic preferences, and routine work habits. For others, it has become the revolutionary and resource-saving opportunity to develop new technologies in the name of environmental advocacy. For more contemplative designers, it has been seen as the beginning of a deeper awareness of the earth and a cause for re-thinking the relationships between architecture and landscape by blending art, philosophy, technology, and the lessons of nature's integrated systems. While this third group is potentially the most productive, the challenges it faces are daunting. It means confronting—and probably having to ultimately embrace—concepts that endanger the institutional frameworks of religion, economy, and politics, not to mention most things the building arts have been about for the last 100 years.

For example, the most disturbing of these questions gnaw at the roots of cultural and theological development since the birth of the world's dominant religions. How are we expected to evaluate and reconcile



**computer model, Saudi Arabian National Museum**

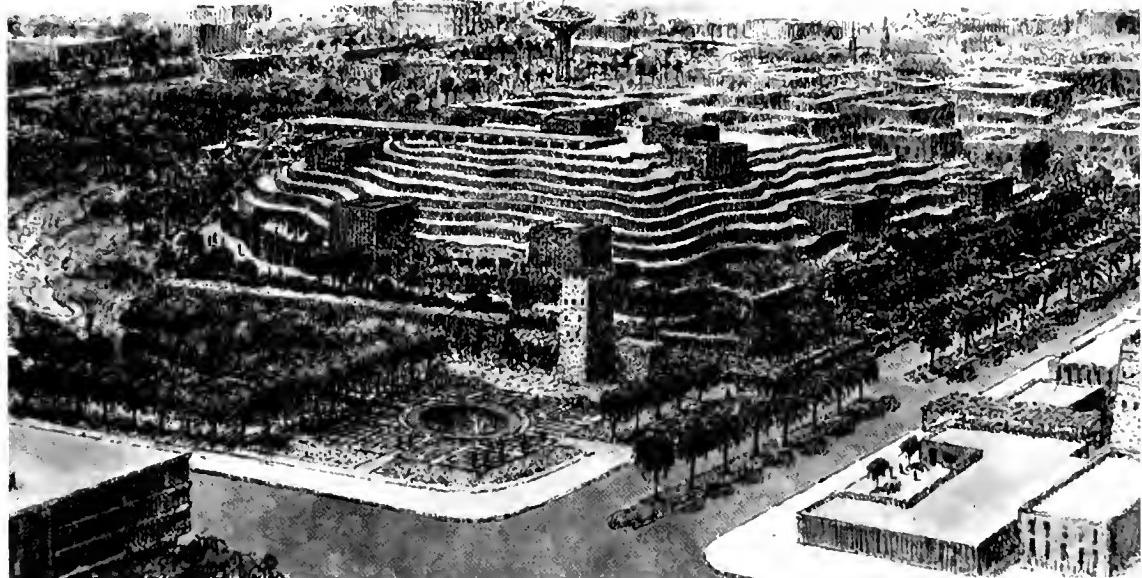
the environmental success of so many multi-theistic ancient and Aboriginal civilizations—when each element of nature was identified by its own divine spirit—versus the dominant mono-theism of today where an all-embracing (male) God is proclaimed in the human image and the destruction of the earth is viewed as a privilege of Man's sovereignty over nature? There is substantial evidence that a distribution of responsibility among multiple gods (of both male and female gender) related to the sun, rain, soil, rivers, crops, etc. has been a far more productive theological vision, both ecologically and agriculturally, than the despotic ego-centrism associated with a single deity and the myopic delusions of "nature for Man's convenience."

Another question is why twentieth century philosophy and linguistic studies have produced so few persuasive voices whose sources of signs and symbols have been drawn from the natural environment? Instead, the majority of leading theoreticians have scavenged through the cacophony of pop billboards, the fetishes of fast-food psychology, and the digitalized rituals of consumer culture (actually, the shallowest elements of surface structure) that block the access to nature...while ignoring the richness of earth-centered symbolism that lies behind this junk world detritus.

Where, one asks, are the theoreticians and interpreters of an evolving eco-language? Where is the Baudrillard, Lacan, Foucault, Levi-Strauss, Barthes, Saussure, or Lyotard of a new "terrestrial signification?"

Rather than address such broad-based philosophical questions, much of the ecologically motivated work today—credited as being sustainable—is nothing more than a catalogue checklist of routine environmental technology and land conservation programs tacked onto otherwise conventionally designed buildings and landscapes. The green mission is essential, the intentions are admirable; yet, the results are boring. A more convincing approach to the fusion of architecture and vegetation should demonstrate an aesthetic commitment to the translation of nature's model of "integrated systems" into innovative visual realizations. The secret now in the building arts is to recover those fragile threads of "connectedness" to the earth that have been lost for most of this century. The archetypal precedents for this approach can be found in all of those contextually harmonious ancient cities of the Middle East, Africa, and Asia, where shelter in concert with nature has maintained its beauty and symbolic presence over the centuries by converting a combination of sustainability, landscape, and communicative iconography into high art. In our

present Age of Information and Ecology, these examples have never been more relevant. Clearly, the interactive dialogue between architecture and landscape is an art, as well as an ecological, imperative.



renderings from SITE's Saudi Arabian National Museum project of 1996 in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia for the Arriyadh Development Corporation





## **Gary Sinter Plant**

*Gary, Indiana*



## Projectiles

*Mark Bain*

### The Dream

70

The Projectiles project is an investigation into the possibilities for active engagement with the built forms of the urban landscape. The goal is to design small scale devices which attach to the exteriors of preexisting structures, inhabit their surface and exert influence on it. The title is suggestive of the aggress involved in the act of placing these "agents of change."

This project was partially inspired by an investigation I made during May of 1996 in East Berlin where building facades still bare the marks of war. These marks reveal a certain revulsion towards a last stronghold, a form of man made erosion agitating the structure of the city. Decay is constant, a recomposing of molecules in continual breakdown. War acts similarly, only through acceleration.

In opposition to this rule of erosion, the traditional practice of architecture stands for the most part as a strictly additive procedure; a technique of engaging the environment with the fabrications of the manmade. This act of building in a sense takes on a certain literal aspect of its own. The practice of addition and the impulse to construct is an obvious target for change. By inverting the conventional idea of production, the action reconfigures to become an exercise of removal or anti-production. It is in this process of subtraction and



16mm film still showing a house and the effect of bacteria acting on the emulsion surface. From a work in progress by filmmaker Louise Bourque.

aerial map tracing possible sites for intervention based on existing chemical transformation already taking place in the "shadow" of industrial fallout, outlined here by a square



unbuilding, whether controlled or uncontrolled, which becomes an interesting area of research.

The ideal would be the middle ground, a hybrid technique where additive and subtractive processes act together in a symbiotic relation of degeneration and regeneration. Perhaps an area where the architect and user could collaborate. Where buildings appear and disappear, becoming forms of permutation and progression unified in relation to their use and the surrounding ecology. In a sense this is the present state of the building practice, only instead of a process of action within the existing constructs, the city yields to the fiscal interests of complete annihilation, the old dissolved into the new. After more than fifty years of preserved history, Berlin's rebirth triggers the erasure of a past.



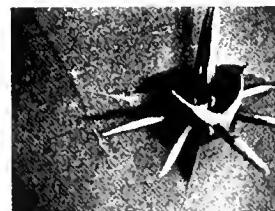
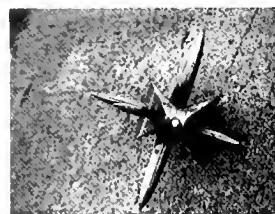
strangler fig enwrapping host tree, which will eventually die leaving its void in the fig's form



### The Tools

The techniques of engagement researched for this project began with the fabrication of simple devices made to be propelled by the user and connect to the intended structures. The first object was a star shape design of hardened steel which, after being implanted, would slowly oxidize and stain the surface of building. Following this initial model, new designs were produced. These incorporated magnetic material to facilitate attachment on metallic surfaces and dagger shapes containing powder charges to aid the connection to masonry. These implements, specifically programmed to carry out a determined long term function, included various additions to aid in their effectiveness such as solar-mechanical actuators, copper/magnesium charges, radio beacons, anti-material polymers, acids, and biological specimens. The small size of these devices, making detection difficult, allows the potential of proliferation and accumulation. If ever discovered and removed, these delivery vehicles will still have triggered the reformative process.

The current stage of the design has led to smaller sized delivery packages coupled with a more powerful projection tool. This involves the use of a high pressure air gun and 20mm sealed soft gelatin capsules similar to those manufactured for drug delivery systems. All the ingredients needed for developing a micro-climate have been placed inside these "softgels." Growth mediums such as agar, nutrients, spores and seeds are contained in a single gel sphere. When fired at the intended target, the projectile, travelling at over 300 feet per second, impacts the surface of the building and breaks open, releasing its contents and creating a splattered area of approximately six to ten inches in diameter. Bacteria, mold, fungi, algae, lichen, moss, cacti, ivy and other hardy species of living organisms infiltrate the surfaces of structures, penetrating an otherwise barren vertical landscape. This aspect of terra-forming (perhaps also seen as terror-forming) is intended to actively engage the host structure with small scale ecosystems that survive through atmospheric nourishment and slow dissolution of the material structure of the building.



Star object embedded into the exterior wall surface of MIT's building N-51, 275 Massachusetts Avenue, Cambridge.



### Predicting Ruination

#### PROJECTILES

attack structures for subtractive removal of existing built forms

contagion imbedded into external attachments

seeding structure with outside influence



imposing will on another's imposition

slow acting cluster bombs

the propagation of a subtractive architecture

the possibilities for external sensing

electronic eyes and ears

live cultures

nodal points

beacon

**Mark Bain's Projectile project punctuates the revolutionary history of anti-architecture that includes Accconi, Archigram, Christo, Coop Himmelblau, Matta Clark, Smithson and Wodiczko, among others.** His projectiles close out this historical project, diffusing its reactive violence with the proposition of a weapon system that ultimately fails to demonstrate the full spectacle of detonation. His small punctures and splatters and the subsequent virus-like processes they inject into their architectural targets, represent a new scale and methodology of desecration, marking the terminus of our mythologies of permanence. Slowly released over time, Bain's injected cultures of degeneration acknowledge the wanng effectiveness of "response time" in an overloaded information based society where political targets have become more difficult, if not impossible to identify.

**The radicality of this project consists of a series of decreasing and comparative accelerations that liberate time.** The initial speed of the projectiles is countered by the slower processes of decay that they inject into the architectural surfaces under attack. These,

in turn, frame the even slower degeneration processes already in play in the real time life of the architecture. Through this last transformation Bain's interventions approach tainted prophecy. They "image" the future, predicting ruination through the slightest window of participation.

**The seeming violence of this project lies elsewhere, in those stoic, unblemished architectural surfaces, those "missed" sites at the limit of Bain's "strikes."** Acts of acceleration can never be liberated from what they leave behind: the arrogance of architecture, a ruin holding off time.

—Dennis Adams,  
Professor of Visual Studies, MIT



Tool kit showing air gun, magazine clip, capsule pellets, dagger points, and star.





## **Calumet Canal**

*South Chicago, Illinois*

## **Corporeal Consciousness & The Permeability of Space**

Bath House

*Master's thesis*

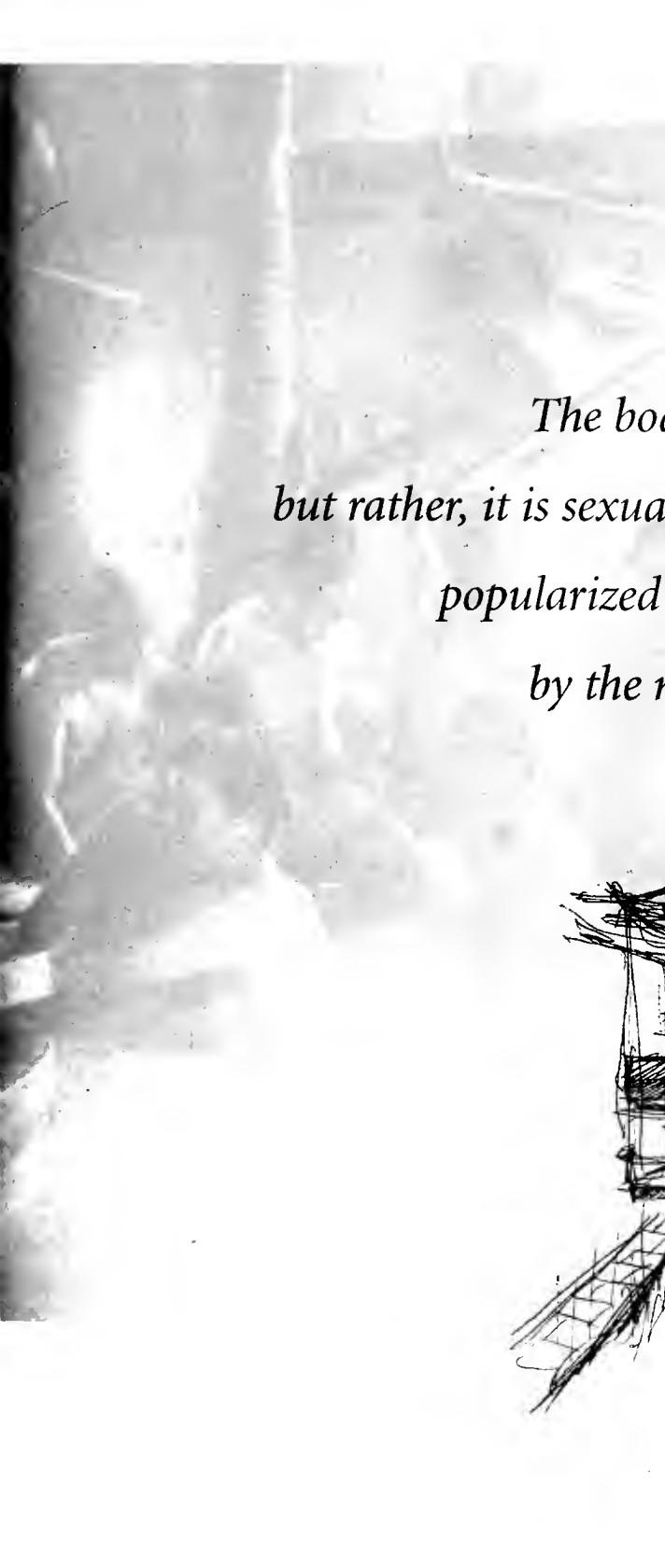
*Aspasia Maheran*

The economic structure of our society requires that people work long hours, leading to increasingly stressful lives with few outlets for the rejuvenation of the mind and body. As a society we have focused on acquisition and competition. Our material possessions have take precedence over our identities. We are disconnected from our bodies and minds, and on the occasion where the spirit is willing there is no outlet. Within the urban environment, places that offer tranquility, rest and relaxation are limited. This thesis explores architecture as a means of allowing the visitor to enter the realms of relaxation, contemplation, and rejuvenation both physically and mentally. My intention is to create a series of spaces where the experience promotes an understanding of the body's relationship to the mind and the environment.

I have chosen a bath house to exemplify this.

Historically, the bath house has offered a ritual that fulfills the needs of the body, mind and spirit. In many countries, bath houses continue to offer social interaction and relaxation. However, placing a bath house in the United States inherently contains many issues besides the experiences specifically designed for rejuvenation. It engages not only our society's image of the bath house but more fundamentally also a collective understanding of our own bodies.

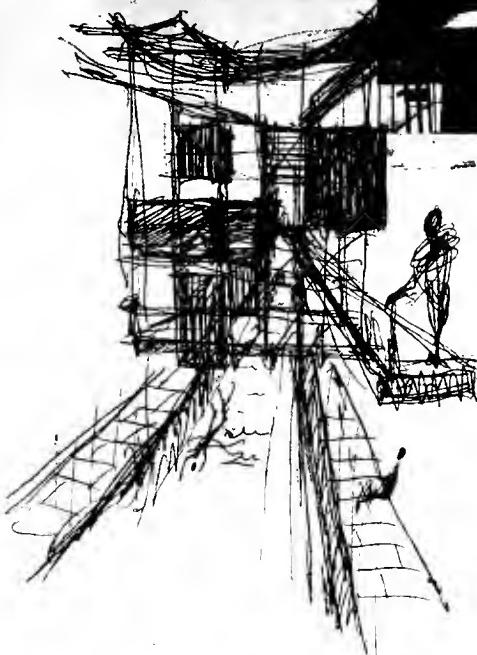




"Man articulates the world through his body...man is not a dualistic being whom spirit and flesh are essentially distinct, but a living corporeal being, active in the world."

Tadao Ando

*The body is not part of nature,  
but rather, it is sexualized,  
popularized  
by the media.*



concept sketch; photo of site in New York City with existing bathhouse



model photos show views to  
massage room (above top), e  
(above bottom) and cafe (right)  
longitudinal section drawing

"The role that bathing plays within a culture reveals the culture's attitude toward human relaxation. It is a measure of how far individual well-being is regarded as an indispensable part of community life."

—Sigfried Giedion



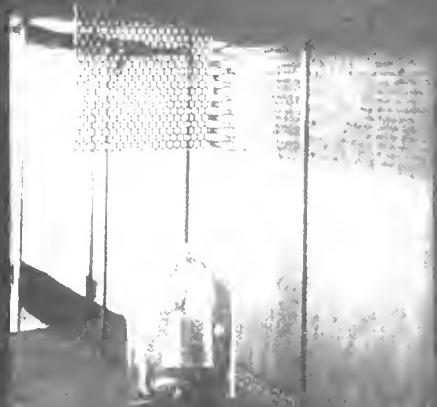
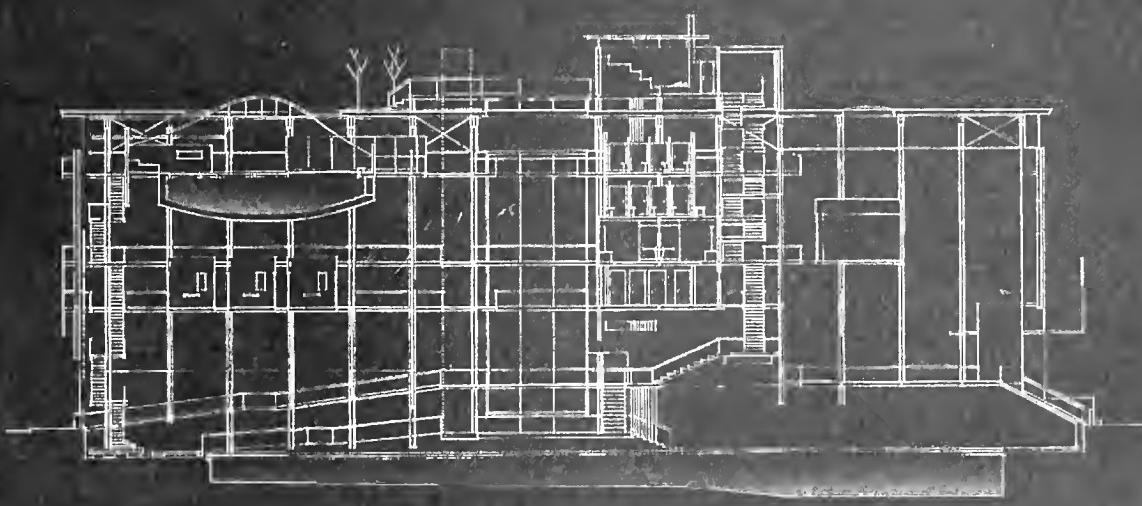
In our repressive culture the body is considered taboo—it must be covered up and hidden. The body is not viewed as a part of nature, but rather, it is sexualized, popularized by the media. The bath house is steeped in rich social history in many countries. But here in the United States, the history of the bath house began as a way to mentally and physically cleanse the poor in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. More recently, during the 1970's and early 1980's, the bath house was considered by some the playground for homosexual promiscuity before the AIDS epidemic. Thus, for many the bath house today remains decadent and disreputable.

The site is New York City's Lower East Side, specifically between 258 10th Street and 417 9th Street. Together these addresses make up a lot that is 25 feet by 200 feet. This particular location has the potential to serve different classes and cultures. Presently, a Turkish and Russian bath house exists at 258 10th Street. However, it remains dense and dark, like its surroundings.

Inserting a bath house into a densely populated urban environment allows it to become an easily accessible part of the community, with entrances on both sides of the block. The new bath house is a public facility, maintained and operated by a private foundation.

We become regularly disconnected from our bodies and minds,

and on the occasion where the spirit is willing must find an outlet.





model view across steel  
structure and bridges

*In our culture, must the body be  
considered taboo? Must it be  
covered up and hidden?*

Corporeal consciousness indicates

a simultaneous awareness of  
both body and mind.



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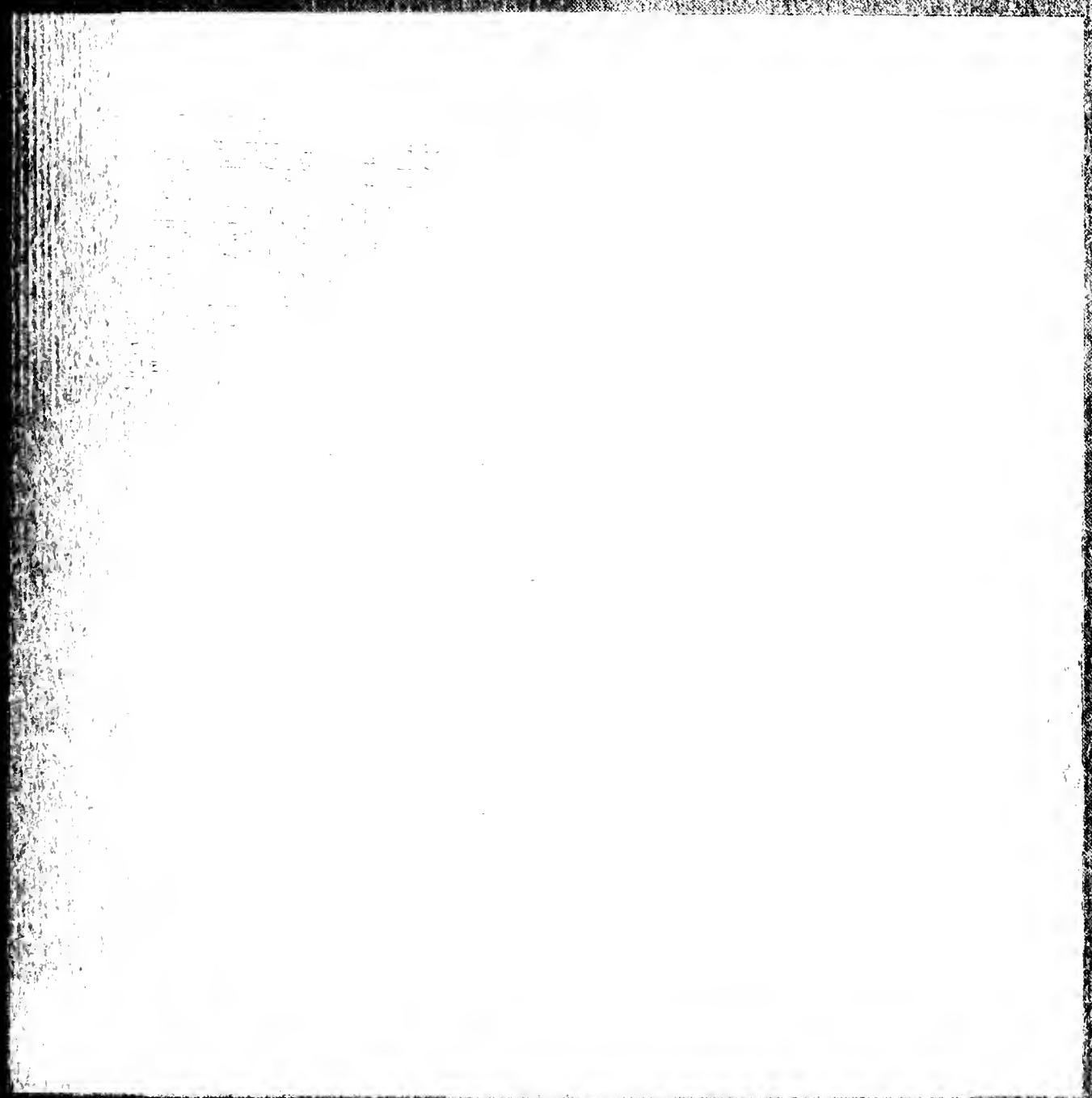


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## **Christmas in Chelsea**

*Chelsea, Massachusetts*



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